

Have you ever had a case of expectations meet reality? You thought the meal looked good on the menu, but it didn't look so good once it was served. You thought your friend had taken a good picture of you, but when you looked at it, you immediately wanted a retake. You thought loading the car for the trip would be easy, but your children wanted to bring so much stuff. Expectations meet reality.

Palm Sunday is *all* about expectations meeting reality. Christ's Palm Sunday parade into Jerusalem wasn't the only parade Jerusalem had ever seen. Roman historians tell us that the governor of Judea, Pontius Pilate, regularly held military parades—parades of Roman cavalry and soldiers who marched into the city of Jerusalem.

From the western side of the city, the opposite side from which Jesus would enter, Pontius Pilate would lead Roman soldiers on horseback and on foot. Each soldier would be clad in leather armor polished to a high gloss. On each soldier's head, hammered helmets would gleam in the bright sunlight. At their sides, sheathed in their scabbards, were swords crafted from the hardest steel; in their hands, each soldier would carry a spear. Or if he was an archer, he carried a bow with a quiver of arrows slung across his back. Drummers would beat out the cadence of the march. The message was clear. Peace came through Roman might and power. Historians call it *Pax Romana*—Roman peace.

On Palm Sunday, Christ's disciples expected that Jesus, coming from the eastern side of the city, would defeat the Roman legions and bring Jewish peace. The crowd on that Sunday proclaimed, "Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!" (John 12:13). The word *Hosanna* means "Save us now!" Hosanna was the cry for King Jesus to replace *Pax Romana* with Jewish peace. They even waved palm branches—the ancient sign for victory!

Jewish peace through King Jesus! That's what people expected—now consider the reality. "And Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is written, 'Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt!'" (John 12:14-15). In ancient times, horses and chariots, not donkeys, brought victory on the battlefield! In 2 Kings 2:12;

13:14, horses and chariots are proverbial for ultimate power. But Jesus rides into Jerusalem on a *donkey*. Not a warhorse, not a stallion. He has no chariots, no army, no sword, no helmet, and no spear. What is Jesus thinking?

No wonder John writes, “His disciples did not understand these things” (John 12:16). They didn’t have a clue! This is a major motif in John’s Gospel.

Let me give you some examples: (1) The master of the Cana wedding feast doesn’t realize where the wine has come from (John 2:9). (2) Jews believe Jesus will rebuild the literal temple in three days (John 2:20). (3) Nicodemus thinks Jesus is talking about a literal second birth (John 3:4, 9). (4) The Samaritan woman misconstrues Jesus’ reference to “living water” (John 4:10–15). (5) The man who was healed doesn’t know who did it (John 5:13). (6) The crowd wants to make Jesus an earthly king (John 6:15). (7) “Not even His brothers believed in Him” (John 7:5). (8) People are confused concerning Jesus’ Bethlehem birth (John 7:41–42). (9) The disciples misconstrue Jesus’ reference to Lazarus having “fallen asleep” (John 11:11–13). (10) Martha doesn’t understand Jesus’ use of “resurrection” (John 11:24). (11) Peter fails to understand the significance of the foot washing (John 13:6–11). (12) The disciples in the Upper Room fail to understand the significance of Judas’ leaving the meal (John 13:28–30). (13) Both Thomas and Philip misunderstand Jesus’ reference to being “the way” (John 14, 5). (14) Peter, by cutting off Malchus’s ear, shows that he fails to understand Jesus’ plan to go to the cross (John 18:10–11). (15) Mary Magdalene does not recognize Jesus (John 20:14–15). (16) Seven disciples go fishing and don’t recognize their risen Lord (John 21:4).

That’s quite a list! It reminds me of a story Art Holst used to tell. Holst was a referee in the NFL. During one game, Kansas City Chiefs tight end Fred Arbanas was tackled so hard that his artificial eye popped out. After a search, the missing eye was found. Arbanas popped it back into place, declined the coach’s offer to send in a sub, and was eager to resume play. Holst playfully said to Arbanas, “Fred, I’m impressed. But what if you had lost the other eye?” “That’s easy,” snapped Arbanas. “I’d become a referee!” Referees aren’t the only ones who are blind. So are people throughout John’s Gospel. So are we!

Let's face it. There are times when we are spiritually blind because we want a different Savior. A Savior who can instantly right our wrongs, heal our hurts, and miraculously deliver us from disease and all sorts of doom and gloom. A Savior that gives only sweetness and light, happiness and heaven.

Expectations meet reality. Do they ever! Judas betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. Peter used a sword in Gethsemane to strike the high priest's servant. All of the disciples abandoned the Savior. Finally, by Friday, most of the Jews ended up rejecting Jesus, crying, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!"

No wonder that by Friday, Jesus was hanging under a sign indicating why Rome executed him: "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews" (MT 27:37). Looking for a king who had pomp and power, people missed seeing that God offers lasting, enduring peace through the King riding on a donkey.

But all is not lost! God turned the darkness of Good Friday into the light of Easter. God turned death with horrific suffering into an empty tomb with great joy. God turned the shadow of the cross into lasting peace.

And this is the kind of peace we need! The Savior's shed blood makes peace so that through faith alone we have peace *with* God (Romans 5:1) as well as the peace *of* God (Philippians 4:7). God delivers this peace in concrete ways in specific places—in the Gospel proclaimed, in Holy Baptism, and in the Lord's Supper.

Some people like to say, "I made my peace with the man upstairs." What they really mean is that they have a cease-fire with God. "God, You stay on Your side of the fence, and I'll stay on mine. God, You stay up in heaven and do Your thing, and I'll stay on earth and do my thing. God, if You don't bother me, I won't bother You!" That's not having peace with God. That's having a cease-fire with God. God offers so much more! He offers a relationship!

I invite you to stand beneath the cross and receive these beautiful promises, all found in John's Gospel. "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you" (John 14:27). "I have said these things to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I

have overcome the world” (John 16:33). “Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, ‘Peace be with you’” (John 20:19).

Expectations meet reality. The reality is that Jesus rides into Jerusalem on a donkey. The reality is that He suffers, bleeds, and dies. The reality is that we are called to take up our cross. The reality is that sometimes prayers go unanswered, hopes are dashed, and deliverance from debt or deliverance from depression doesn’t come.

Christ’s disciples didn’t stay in the dark about Palm Sunday forever. John writes, “His disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written about Him and had been done to Him” (John 12:16). The disciples finally understood the peace of Jesus and—by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit—so shall we! And we will not just understand it, but we will also receive it and share it and live it.

“Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey’s colt!” (John 12:15) Amen.