

Sermon: Mark 11:1-11, Holy Trinity Frogmore, 21st January 2007

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NB: This is what I planned to say, what actually came out was probably slightly different

1. Expectations

I wonder what you expected would happen on Thursday?

We'd had weather forecasts saying that there would be strong winds: but what did we expect?

Clare and I were having lunch, when a crack and a loud shuffling noise told us that a large tree was down in the back garden - only yards from the house.

Mark, our apprentice, went into London for his Bible course - and couldn't get out again because of all the travel disruption.

I wonder what happened to you? I wonder if you were expecting it?

It's pretty clear that the people in our Bible passage this morning weren't expecting what was about to happen to Jesus.

They did have expectations of Jesus - but not the right ones.

A. What do we expect of Jesus?

And it's possible that we're not that different from them.

What do you expect of Jesus?

What can Jesus do for you? What will he do for you?

Will he help you with your illnesses? Give you a fulfilled life? Will he bring peace to this world? Will he ask for changes in your lifestyle?

What do you expect of Jesus?

Here in 11:1-11, Mark introduces all the big themes of the next 7 days of Jesus' life - big themes that are right at the heart of our very existence.

And Mark shows us that what happens here, and what is about to happen, fulfils Scripture, and defies expectations.

What happens fulfils Scripture, and defies expectations.

2. What happens...

First of all: What happens!

Jesus comes to Jerusalem. He comes from the South East, via two villages in the area of the Mount of Olives - Bethphage and Bethany. Bethany was the village where Simon the Leper, and Lazarus Mary and Martha all lived - and Jesus stays in Bethany for the first few nights of his visit to Jerusalem.

Jesus has specific instructions for a pair of his followers: there's a young donkey, which has never been ridden, and it's tied up - get it. If they ask you why: tell them **"the Lord needs it, and will send it back here shortly"**.

Now it's very possible that Jesus has already made arrangements with the donkey's owner - anyway, they get the colt, put their cloaks on it, and Jesus sits on it.

Then the party begins - some people lay cloaks on the road, others get foliage and lay it down; and they head off down the Mount of Olives and up into Jerusalem. As they walk along, in front and behind people are shouting out **"Hosanna!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!" "Hosanna in the highest!"**

You wonder what the residents of Jerusalem must have made of this?

They would be used to festivals and celebrations - with visitors coming from all over the place at various times of the year - and this was a busy time of year - the Passover Festival was this week.

We're not told how many people made up Jesus' crowds - but this was definitely more than a sideshow - Matthew tells us that it caused quite a disturbance when they reached the temple - and the authorities were unsettled by it all.

But If you'd have been one of Jesus' followers - it was, all in all, quite a happy, and joyful occasion.

Sometimes people give the impression that by the end of the week these very same crowds had turned on Jesus and were shouting 'crucify him'.

Well - there were crowds doing exactly that, but they probably weren't the same people. These people, today, on this first Palm Sunday, were probably serious followers - not the rent-a-crowd drummed up by the authorities on Good Friday.

What happens? It was an exciting day for Jesus' followers.

3. ...Fulfil Scripture

And What happens - fulfils Scripture.

This was written about, years before it happened - in their Scriptures - our Old Testament.

So the OT, far from being a 'dusty old book full of odd things that don't really matter because they're before Jesus' - it's a goldmine, vital for us, so that we can understand Jesus.

And Jesus came into Jerusalem in this strange way, because God's plan is being fulfilled, and for those with eyes to see, the OT will explain it.

A. OT

So what OT prophecies was he fulfilling?

i. Genesis 49:10-11

First of all, from Genesis 49:10-11, a blessing on Judah, the 4th son of Jacob.

As Jacob lay dying, he blessed his 12 sons with prophetic words: Here's Judah's blessing: **"The sceptre will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his. 11 He will tether his donkey to a vine, his colt to the choicest branch;"**

Did you notice how much talk there is, in these verses, about the colt being tied and untied? Perhaps that's because: this is the colt from that blessing on Judah.

Jesus is a descendant of Judah - and he is the one from whom the sceptre will never depart - he is the King that all the nations will be obey.

ii. Zechariah 9:9

And then, more obviously, Zechariah 9v9.

Zechariah lived 500 years before Jesus, and at a difficult time in Israel's history, told them of the return of their King - the Messiah: **(9:9-11) Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.**

And here he is, Jerusalem: **"riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey."**

What happens here fulfils Scripture. God has declared his purposes in advance, and now it's happening.

B. Odds on

There are, apparently, 48 major prophecies about the Messiah in the Old Testament - and Jesus fulfils them all. What are the odds against that? one in a trillion, trillion, trillion ... and seven more trillions!

When people are trying to match up Nostradamus' predictions, they can find pretty sketchy similarities with just a few historical events. But here there are 48 predictions where what happened to Jesus matches the specifics.

Jesus is no accident of history - he is the ultimate goal of history. God has organised history around his plan of salvation, and told us about it in the Bible.

I wonder how well you know your OT? It's a goldmine for our understanding of Jesus.

What happens... fulfils Scripture.

4. ... but Defies Expectations

So - what does that mean about who Jesus is and what he's doing?

What happens... fulfils Scripture.... but Defies Expectations.

A. Their expectations

The people at the time did know about these Messianic prophecies - but they were kind of selective in what they were looking for. So they had expectations, but they were greatly coloured by what was going on - with the Romans and all that. What would the Messiah do - bring freedom from Roman Rule, and Herod's oppression.

And the disciples had expectations, as well - they had been with Jesus for some time now, and he was incredibly popular. He was the equivalent of a celebrity - crowds would gather wherever he went.

And not long ago - (ch 9) Peter James and John have seen Jesus transfigured before their very eyes - in a mountain top meeting with Moses and Elijah - he really is extraordinary.

So what are they to expect when they come to Jerusalem? Mix the Messianic expectations with Jesus' celebrity - and the sky's your limit!

We know that they thought glory would be theirs soon - flip back a page, and James and John are asking for key positions in Jesus' glorious government - secretary of State and chancellor of the exchequer perhaps.

But Jesus is going to defy these expectations. They're going to be surprised!

And maybe Jesus defies our expectations as well?

What do we think Jesus can do for us? What are we expecting?

Mark's account of the crowd's joyful shouting introduces us to what we should expect of Jesus - in the next 7 days of his life, and forever - as he shows us the Saviour, the King, and the Kingdom - and defies our expectations!

B. The Saviour

First of all, the Saviour.

i. Their expectations

The crowd shouts: "**Hosanna!**" - which is a Praise word, with a Hebrew background meaning: **Save us, now!**

They were most probably hoping for a Saviour who would free them from the Romans. Their Messiah, they hoped, would bring rescue from Roman rule. "Hosanna!" - Save us, now!

ii. Reality

And Jesus is the Saviour. He is, from Zechariah, **the "king [who] comes to you, righteous and having salvation"**

But the surprise will be seeing Jesus on the cross, dying: that is how he provides salvation, that is where he achieves it, and becomes the Saviour.

It is on the cross that Jesus fulfils another OT prophecy: (Isaiah 53:5) **“he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.”**

We are not, by nature, right with God.

Transgressions and iniquities are what we're about - Our nature, as humans, is messed up - we don't want what God wants. We want what we want - and if we realise there's a clash with God's will - we're more likely to go our way, than his, aren't we?

[Jade mouthing off on Big Brother - that's not an isolated incident: we're all like that in some way or another, but maybe I'm better at restraining yourself, or maybe the camera's are just never there when I'm like it.]

Imagine if God set up a courtroom: we'd be the criminals in the dock: the charge would be: rebellion, treason; and the judgment: guilty.

Only we don't have to imagine: we are under God's judgement.

This is why we need rescue - we're not right with God. And Jesus, by dying on the cross, takes the death penalty that we deserve. This is God's rescue plan - declared and organised throughout human history, that we read about through the OT and into the New.

So Jesus is the Saviour - not from Roman Rule, but from the penalty for sin. We can turn to him, and be put right with God.

iii. Us?

So what are we expecting from Jesus, today? physical healing? a sense of well-being? a more fulfilled social life?

None of these are anywhere as vital as what Jesus actually offers: He can save us from ourselves, our sinful, selfish selves. He can put us right with God, never mind what our health or social life is like.

Think of the paralysed man, in Mark 2, whose friends took him to Jesus, and hacked through someone's roof and lowered him down. What did Jesus do? This man couldn't walk. It's obvious what he needs. Have a look - Mark 2v5: **“Son, your sins are forgiven”** - Jesus is the Saviour.

He does, then, heal him. But first he deals with the most important need.

We're just like that man - all sorts of presenting issues - but one fatal disease: we are rebels against God, and we need Rescuing.

Have you received Jesus as your Saviour? Don't delay - it is the best thing you could ever do.

He is the wonderful Saviour we need. And that is why we see him here, the Saviour, on his way into Jerusalem on a donkey, fulfilling Scripture, defying expectations.

C. Of King

He is also the King.

i. Their expectations

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” - they shout, from Psalm 118

They would be wanting a replacement for Herod - someone to sit on the political throne in Jerusalem - someone to set up just law courts, and to get rid of oppression; someone to make Israel great again, amongst all the nations.

That's the kind of king they'd like.

Imagine you sent your car in for a service - you'd like an oil change, just to keep things going. But the garage rings up: I'm sorry sir, it's not an oil change you need - it's a new engine!

ii. Reality

And God's plan was not just an oil change - putting another, earthly king in place - his purpose was to do something completely new.

This King has great power - **“the sceptre is his,”** (as in Genesis 49), but he will take up his rule with great humility - **“riding gently on donkey”** (as in Zech 9:9) - and suffering. And he will rule not just over Israel, but over the whole world: **“the nations will come to him”** - he'll call men, women and children to himself, saving and transforming lives, and making radical demands - like Mark 8:34 **"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."**

We're going to see the King of the Jews in the next few chapters - but not as people expected.

iii. Us?

What do we expect of our lives as Jesus' subjects?

Perhaps we think he'll be like Queen Elizabeth the 2nd - a figurehead who doesn't interfere very much?

Maybe we're thinking like James and John just a chapter before - expecting a comfortable ride from Jesus?

But no, this King suffers, dies, and rises for us - and then calls us to turn our lives around, and live for him.

But I wonder who is really in charge, as far as you and I are concerned?

D. Of Kingdom

He defies expectation, doesn't he? - as the Saviour, and the King - and even the Kingdom is not what they think.

i. Their expectations

“blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David” they cry - v.10

No doubt they're looking forward to Free Israel.

ii. Reality

But what Jesus brings is the Kingdom of God - a kingdom he begins with his death and resurrection, but that we won't see completely until he returns.

In chapter 1, Jesus declared:(1:15) **"The time has come, ... The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"**

And now it has come - but in two stages: now, and not yet.

Now: because of what is about to happen where we are in chapter 11 - now, we can become members of Jesus Kingdom - we can turn to him in trust, and experience his rule in his lives, and become one of his people.

But then there's more to come: the “not yet” - the physical reality where Jesus will make a new world, his kingdom members will live with him.

iii. Us?

But sometimes we expect the benefits of the Kingdom to be completely with us now.

Perhaps we want to see Jesus face to face, or hear his voice in our ears - and we wonder why we can't? One day we will, but not yet.

Perhaps we want **“no more death or mourning or crying or pain”** (Rev 21:4) - and we wonder: why am I experiencing this?

One day it will come - but not yet.

But rest assured, Jesus' kingdom has begun.

And you can enter his kingdom, if you haven't already, by committing yourself to Jesus.

And one day Jesus will complete his kingdom - and if we have trusted in him, then we will find that all Scripture has been fulfilled, and we will cry, with all the right expectations: **"Hosanna!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!" "Hosanna in the highest!"**

5. Expecting?

What are you expecting of Jesus?

As they partied and Jesus entered Jerusalem, they had the right idea - but the wrong expectations.

Mark helps us to understand - as he begins his account of this amazing week, that is right at the heart of human history - he helps us to understand that Jesus is the Saviour, the King of the Kingdom.

What happens fulfils Scripture and defies Expectations.

So don't let your OT get dusty - we need it to understand our Lord Jesus Christ, to expect the right things from him.

What are you expecting from Jesus?

The Saviour - he provides the biggest most vital rescue you need: from the judgement you deserve before God. Have you received that from him?

The King - he loves and serves you, he has given himself for you - but will you now give yourself for him?

The Kingdom - he has done all that is needed in his death and resurrection, he invites you in: will you be patient and trusting, because the best is still to come?