

Let us pray... Hosanna in the highest, hear our prayers today... Guide our hearts and turn our expectations into hope... Hope that lives only in you... Amen.

I've never been to the Holy Land, but I've learned that to travel from Jericho to Jerusalem is quite the journey...

Jericho is the lowest city on earth and is more than 800 feet below sea level.

And Jerusalem, a mere 18 miles away or so is over 2 thousand feet above sea level...

Which means that you gain over 3,000 feet in elevation going from Jericho to Jerusalem...

Mind you this distance is also over terrain that is not the most desirable...

It is dry, it is rocky, there is very little coverage, and not much vegetation...

A journey, that Jesus would have made multiple times in his life...

A journey that must have been filled with a lot of anticipation and excitement, especially for his disciples... Who probably asked a bunch of times... "Are we there yet? Because Jerusalem was one glorious city...

A city on top of a hill, a city where vegetation burst to life, and most importantly this was where their temple was...

And the temple was considered God's dwelling place...

The temple was also where they would hear the scriptures being read, scripture we now refer to as the Old Testament.

The temple was where they would go to make animal sacrifices to God...

And the temple was of utmost importance during Jewish Festivals and Holidays... Especially for Passover.

And this is the backdrop to our Gospel today... Jesus and his followers are making their way from Jericho to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover.

And Passover is all about freedom... Passover commemorates God freeing God's people from slavery in Egypt...

Which means that Passover is a time of great joy, excitement, and celebration...

And this Passover, Jesus is also in the mix, bringing an added layer of excitement.

And as we all know, there is something special about Jesus, but the disciples don't seem to really know what this is...

They think it has something to do with him being a king... A king who has come to free them once again, from their oppression.

So, I can only imagine that the disciples are getting pumped up... Not only is their blood pumping from walking up a hill, but they are on their way to the glorious city of Jerusalem to celebrate Passover...

A celebration they think is going to end in their freedom yet again, with Jesus overthrowing the Roman Empire.

Naturally, news spreads, people start gathering and they all treat Jesus like they would royalty...

They lay their cloaks on the road, they wave branches, and they shout Hosanna...

Hosanna being a Hebrew word that mixes exuberant praise and prayer to God, trusting God will save God's people, and will do so right away...

This energy had to be exhilarating, culminating at the top of the hill, in the glorious city of Jerusalem, and ending in their beloved temple...

And then what happens? A whole bunch of nothing...

It says Jesus looked around the temple and since I was late, he went to find a place to sleep...

This would be like a wedding party walking in for their Grand March, the crowd cheering, and then comes the newlywed couple...

They are introduced, walk up to the head table, take a look around and then leave and go to bed.

Who would do that?

This would leave everyone confused at first... And then it would lead to frustration and maybe even anger... Especially if you were the parents paying for this wedding...

So, what is going on in our text, what are we missing?

Perhaps Jesus' entry into Jerusalem wasn't as triumphant as people thought?

Afterall, a triumphant entry would require more than a crowd... It would require an army...

A triumphant entry would involve riding a warhorse, not a colt that has never been ridden or trained.

And a triumphant entry most of all, would end with overthrowing the Empire, not looking around the Temple and then going to bed.

Something is going on here... Something, that might get Jesus killed...

Perhaps this why Jesus told the disciples to get him an unriden and untrained colt... As riding this colt would be dangerous... The colt could buck him off at any time, which could kill him...

A colt is both dangerous and unexpected for a triumphant entry... Foreshadowing that Jesus is about to do something dangerous, and also unexpected...

Which we will see play out this week, during Holy Week...

Jesus' unexpected actions are going to both frustrate and anger his followers, revealing that he isn't the triumphant king, they expected...

Causing them turn against Jesus... As they are the ones who will ultimately decide Jesus' fate...

These are the people who choose to free Barabas instead of Jesus...

Which brings us to an uncomfortable question... How would this play out today?

What Jesus are we expecting?

What Jesus are you looking for, and what do you expect from him?

When I am confronted with hard questions like these, I find it best to turn to God in prayer...

And prayer is all about hope... Because prayer is at the heart of hope...

By hoping God hears our prayers, we place our hope in God.

And when we place our hope in God, we stop looking for a Jesus that we have tailor made... We stop placing expectations on him... And we start putting our trust in him.

And this kind of trust can be hard... Especially knowing it often leads to the cross...

But what comes after the cross makes all the difference in the world.

What comes after the cross is the embodied hope of the resurrection...

This is where God's hope lives on... Hope found in the joy of Easter morning...

Which is what we will celebrate next Sunday... But before we get there, we have to do some looking around, just like Jesus did...

Looking inward at our own temples and our own expectations of Jesus...

By turning to God in prayer, and reflection... Opening ourselves to the transformative power of the Holy Spirit and placing our hope in God alone.

And, to show us how to do that...

I would like to invite our Sunday School kids to come forward by sharing through song, how they put their hope in God alone.... Amen....