

Draw Near and Experience the Unexpected

Luke 19:28-44

INTRODUCTION

A couple of weeks ago Karen and I had the opportunity to visit our daughter's family out in the St. Louis area. Truthfully, we were there to see our grandkids, Callum and Chandler, ages 2½ and 7 months old. After the kids went to bed, we four adults watched a movie on Netflix.

The movie was titled "The Power of the Dog." I had never heard of it, but it won an Academy Award for Best Directing. It was pretty good. Wikipedia describes it as a "Western psychological drama." The movie's own website offers this description:

A domineering rancher responds with mocking cruelty when his brother brings home a new wife and her son, until the unexpected comes to pass.

And the ending was indeed unexpected. In the words of my son-in-law, "I didn't see that coming." I won't spoil the ending for you any more than I just have. Just know that it was totally unexpected.

It's that word "unexpected" that really struck me as I studied the text for today's sermon. Because the events of that day – that "first Palm Sunday" – don't turn out the way everyone expected them to turn out.

Oh, there were many things that went as expected:

- Jesus told his disciples there would be a donkey in the town up ahead. And sure enough, when they arrived at the village they found a donkey tied up and waiting for them – just like they expected.
- Jesus even told what the owners of the colt would say when they started to leave with ... right down to the very last word! And they said it!
- The response Jesus told them to give worked, too.

And it doesn't stop there.

- The crowds celebrating the arrival of Jesus were expected too. They had been waiting for a long time to see this man they believed to be the promised Messiah come riding into town.
- The religious leaders objected, of course. They had been objecting for three years, so why would this day be any different?

If the text stopped here, the title of this sermon might well have been "Jesus Always Does Exactly What You Expect." But it doesn't stop here. Instead of riding His donkey to the palace of Governor Pilate and starting the hoped for revolution against Rome, Jesus pauses at the city gates and weeps for the city He is about to enter.

- Instead of rallying the people into a urban militia, He makes a prophetic statement about the city's future:

The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you." (Luke 19:33-34)

And the week would continue in that way.

- He would use a whip to drive merchants out of the Temple, and yet offer no resistance to the soldiers who came to arrest Him.
- He would wrap a towel around His waist like a servant despite being the leader of the group.
- He would remain silent during His trial.
- And from the cross, He would forgive those who had mistreated Him.

No one expected any of that.

Why would he do those things? Why is it that God never does anything we rationale human beings think He should? That's not the way God works.

These words in Isaiah 55 speak to that:

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord.
"As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts." (Isaiah 55:10)

The closer you come to the cross ... the more time you spend in the presence of God ... the more you become aware that "unexpected" is God's standard operating procedure.

In the presence of God you should always expect the unexpected.

God does not fit within our expectations. He does not even try to fit within our expectations. He is not like us. He is wholly different that we are. And nowhere is that more apparent than in the cross.

Listen to the words of Philippians 2 again, this time from the Message paraphrase:

He had equal status with God but didn't think so much of himself that he had to cling to the advantages of that status no matter what. Not at all. When the time came, he set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave, became *human*! Having become human, he stayed human. It was an incredibly humbling process. He didn't claim special privileges. Instead, he lived a selfless, obedient life and then died a selfless, obedient death—and the worst kind of death at that—a crucifixion.

So today we celebrate an unexpected ending. So what difference does that make? Let me suggest two:

DIFFERENCE #1: BECAUSE GOD DOES THE UNEXPECTED, WE NEVER LOSE HOPE

In the early pages of the Bible God promised an old man named Abraham that he would father a son, and that his offspring would outnumber the stars in the sky. At age 99, God did the unexpected and Abraham became a daddy! Imagine that! Age 99!

- I'm 3½ decades younger than that, and spending two days with my grandkids in St. Louis wears me out!

But the Bible tells us that:

Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, "So shall your offspring be." ¹⁹ Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah's womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. (Romans 4:18-21)

Are you ...

- Praying faithfully for the salvation of a loved one, and beginning to wonder if God can ever break through that hard heart?
- Still reeling from that diagnosis?
- In despair over the news of crime and chaos that fills the air waves?
- Wondering how you will pay for that next bag of groceries or tank of gas?

DRAW NEAR to the cross and experience the unexpected ways of God.

DIFFERENCE #2: BECAUSE GOD DOES THE UNEXPECTED, TRUST HIM TO DO WHAT IS RIGHT

In these remaining days of the Lenten season, as you reflect on your life, your struggles, your disappointments, your joys and your victories, remember that God is God and we are not.

God doesn't do things in our timing and as we think they ought to be done. But He knows best. And we need to remind ourselves of that every day.

The level of our faith does not guarantee God will do what we want, but it does give us a wonderful sense of security and peace knowing that He takes care of us. And because He is faithful and good, we can trust and worship Him without completely understanding what is going on around us.

APPLICATION

A youth pastor from Illinois wrote this story about our unexpected God:

I left work early so I could have some uninterrupted study time right before the final in my Youth Issues class. When I got to class, everybody was doing their last minute studying. The professor came in and said he would review with us for just a little bit before the test.

Most of the review was right from the study guide, but there were some things he went over that I had never heard of. When questioned about it, he said that "It's in the book and you are responsible for everything in the book." We couldn't really argue with that.

Finally it was time to take the test. He passed them out with this instruction "Leave the test face down on your desk until everyone has one and I'll tell you to start." When we turned them over, every answer on the test was already filled in!

And at the bottom of the last page we read the following:

This is the end of the Final Exam. All the answers on your test are correct. You will receive an 'A.' The reason you passed the test is because the creator of the test took it for you. All the work you did in preparation for this test did not help you earn this A. It is an unexpected gift for from the creator.

The professor then went around the room and asked each student individually,

- What is your grade?
- Do you deserve the grade you are receiving?
- How much did all of your studying help you achieve your final grade?

Now I am not a crier by any stretch of the imagination, but I had to fight back tears when answering those questions and thinking about how the Creator has passed the test for me.

In the moments afterward, the discussion went something like this:

All semester long I have tried to teach you that God works in unexpected ways. And I've tried to communicate to you that you need to communicate this truth with the young people you will serve.

It's not just young people who need to learn this truth. We all do.

Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. (James 4:8)

In very unexpected ways.

Amen.