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Matthew 26:14-27:66

Isaiah 50:4-9a

Psalm 31:9-16

Philippians 2:5-11

March 29, 2026

Palm Sunday

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Does Jesus ever disappoint you?<sup>1</sup>

I know...it may seem like a strange question especially for us church-goers. Jesus? Disappointing? Say it isn't so.

But nevertheless, this is the question I want us to consider this morning and for good reason.

Let us start with some context. We open Palm Sunday with shouts of Hosanna! This is our king! This is the Son of David who is going to save us! Emotions are high. Hopes and dreams are about to be fulfilled. The world is going to change. And all of that expectation is placed upon this one man.

And not only that...he looks and acts as though he is fulfilling the prophecy...your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey. This is what the people have been promised. I want you just to imagine the energy that is brewing. The crowds hearing the rumble of revelation. Excitement, anticipation, freedom at their fingertips. All the while...the sounds of the Roman Empire beating and pulsing in the background. It all seemed like a miracle...this savior coming down the mountain and entering the city gates with a presence they couldn't quite describe. And he was going to not only confront the Empire but he was going to overthrow the oppressors. That was what the people were hoping for.

So the people get involved in the movement...waving their branches, laying down their cloaks...creating a makeshift red carpet for their king.

But, we know the story that is about to unfold - in a few short days that red carpet will be rolled up from the ground and instead a rock will be rolled in front of a tomb.

We often focus on the grief of those close to Jesus who watched him die on the cross and on those who buried him...the people named in the Bible narrative. But what about the people in the crowds...people like you and me? After all of the hype...might they have walked away...disappointed?

Afterall, this wasn't the god they had been hoping for.

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<sup>1</sup> This question was inspired by the insightful post of John van de Laar. You can read it here: <https://sacredise.substack.com/p/lectionary-reflection-for-palm-passion>

And I get it. Because sometimes I'm not sure how I feel about this version of Jesus. When we are tired, worn down, and longing for relief, a savior who gets crucified can be hard to stomach. We want answers. We want action. And we want someone to do the heavy lifting to create change we long to see, the freedom we long to experience.

Take our grief away. Relieve our suffering. Do away with the things that hurt us. Make things better!

And the answer Jesus gives can be downright frustrating...and disappointing.

Is this the god we were hoping for? A god who leaves us wanting something more?

What kind of a god are you hoping for this Easter? A god who forgives? A god who rescues? A god who promises deliverance? I think we all want those things and our faith promises them to us. But what does that promise of deliverance actually look like? How is it carried out? Are we hoping for a god who does the work for us? And what happens when the work isn't done (at least not in the way we wanted it to be done) and it's left up to us to create the change we long to see?

Palm Sunday asks these questions. And like the people who followed Jesus into the city that day, we have to decide...will we be left disappointed or will we see that this was a king who wanted to do more than patch together a temporary solution of liberation?

Because Jesus was different...He wanted to teach us how to cultivate our own long lasting sustainable solution. He wanted to give us the tools to keep going even when he wasn't around in person. He wanted to show us that walking behind a king and waving our branches of adulation wasn't enough. We needed to learn how to walk with a king...side by side.

To do that we have to first become clear about what that walk means.

I want to suggest to you that even though Jesus could have overthrown the Roman Empire he didn't because doing so would have perpetuated a false narrative of what power was supposed to look like. Sure the leader could have been overthrown but the hearts of the people who followed that leader would still be intact.

And Jesus wasn't going after a regime change. He was going after a heart change. And that was going to require a longer, more consistent effort than just putting a new person into power.

As Richard Rohr stated..."Your image of God creates you. You become the God you worship."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> <https://cac.org/daily-meditations/baking-the-cake-from-the-bottom-up-2017-01-02/>

Therefore, if our God or our leader is cruel or power hungry then we become cruel and power hungry. If our God is unjust, we become unjust. What we look up to and what we allow is what we become. That's the point Rohr is making.

But on the other hand, if God is presented as a humble, loving servant, then we are shown what that means for our own lives. That example matters.

John van de Laar astutely suggests...

"...when we cling to an image of God that is defined by power and domination, we have to ignore most of Jesus' life and message." The two do not go hand in hand. They are in direct opposition to each other.

And so it might be rather disappointing if Jesus doesn't provide the power and domination we were hoping for. The world teaches us that power and prestige, security and stability look like a leader who is forceful, dominant, and driven by material gain and social status. And if that's the kind of leader or the kind of god we look up to it's no wonder that Jesus might be disappointing. Because to follow the kind of leader Jesus exemplifies means that we have to address our personal motivations and desires...we have to address our heart. We have to change our lives in to something that might seem counterintuitive to the world around us.

Paul talks about this very dynamic in his letter to the church in Philippi. The church had become enamored with power and privilege. The ethos of Rome had become a touch point to how they wanted to follow Jesus. The Philippians may have wanted to walk beside Jesus in theory but their hearts were walking with Roman ideals. And Paul speaks about this with clarity:

"...let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness."

And that humanness that Jesus embodied is precious to God not as an embodiment of power but as an embodiment of love and service. Not as a tool for dominance but as a path toward abundance. Not to the exclusion of anyone but the inclusion of everyone.

Why is this important? It's important because the beliefs and actions of the people will always fuel the systems that we choose to follow. Jesus understood this. So we can fuel systems of dominance, or we can fuel systems of compassion. We can fuel systems of power and privilege, or we can fuel systems of love and mercy.

As I have heard many people state...the world is as it is because of the choices we make.

And those choices are most often influenced by the leaders and the systems we choose to follow. And so when Jesus rode into Jerusalem, he became for us a different kind of leader. A better example. A more impactful presence that takes hold of our hearts and asks us to walk with him. Side by side.

That's the kind of leader Jesus was. And he has empowered us all to follow.