

“The Unexpected Messiah”
Luke 19:28-40
March 28, 2010 - Palm Sunday,
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Imagine being in the crowd that day in Jerusalem. Excitement in the air, an impromptu parade had begun. Everyone loves a parade! People had begun taking off their cloaks, placing them on the road before the person of honor. Could it be a military hero returning home after a mighty conquest surrounded by an arsenal of men and weapons? Parades celebrating military domination typically took a while. There were soldiers on horses laden with the spoils of war, throng after throng of soldiers on foot, possibly even defeated victims of war captured and brought back to be sold into slavery.

People were shouting and waving palm branches. Someone said it was the Messiah! The One promised in ancient prophecies. “He who Saves! The Messiah—the One sent by God to conquer the world! Certainly he will overthrow the Roman government. We will be free at last the Israelites must have thought. Foreign soldiers will no longer occupy our land, give us orders and mandate high taxes to support their emperors. We will finally be free from their tyranny.

Jesus appears . . . a solitary man riding a donkey. Where are his soldiers? Women and children are following him. They can’t be soldiers? Look at that ragtag group of men, they look more like fishermen than men of war. Caesar’s kingdom is based on domination and ruthless power while this man preaches the kingdom of God based on justice, mercy and the love of God. How effective will justice, mercy and the love of God be? How will one man topple the Roman government especially without weapons of destruction? This is the Messiah? He is not what we expected!!

Such was the story of Jesus’ life. The Israelites knew the prophecies in scripture about the coming Messiah. They knew what to expect. Jesus, however, was not what they expected.

Imagine riding with the Wise Men following the star in the East that signaled the Messiah’s birth. They were searching for the King of Kings and Lord of Lords as prophesied in scripture. They went straight to the palace upon entering Jerusalem. Where else would they find the newborn King? Herod was just as surprised at the news of the Messiah’s birth as the Wise Men were to not find the baby in

the palace. Following that magnificent star led them to a lowly stable in Bethlehem. There they found the newborn King. The King of Kings and Lord of Lords was born in a stable in the midst of animals, the smell of manure heavy in the air. The Messiah born in a lowly stable? That was not what the Wise Men expected!

He was not born into the circumstances expected for the Messiah, nor did Jesus behave the way people expected the Messiah to behave.

Imagine the kind of dinner party you would anticipate if you had been invited to the home of a prominent religious leader. Jesus was the invited guest of honor along with leaders of the synagogue. A woman crashes the dinner party and not just any woman, Luke's gospel describes her as "a sinner in a house full of Pharisees." Crashing the party is one thing but this woman completely disgraces herself by falling all over Jesus thanking him for his forgiveness. She weeps and pours extravagant perfume on his feet drying them with her hair. Her display of gratitude is too sensual for public display, too extravagant in terms of cost, highly inappropriate for any woman in that culture much less a woman of her character. The host, thoroughly repulsed by the woman's actions, expects Jesus to respond likewise. Much to the Pharisee's surprise, Jesus accepts the woman's extravagant display of gratitude rather than telling her to be quiet or running her off. Jesus points out it is the woman, not the prominent host, who has shown him respect. The church leader is chastised for his behavior while the woman of ill repute is praised for hers. Not the behavior church leaders expected from the Messiah.

Another day the religious authorities brought a woman caught in adultery before Jesus. The law was clear on such matters. Anyone caught in the act of adultery was to be stoned. It seems rather odd only the woman was brought before Jesus, the man involved must have somehow escaped. She alone is accused. Religious leaders state the woman's crime, expecting Jesus – devout Jew that he is-- to uphold the punishment – death by stoning. Jesus moves right to the action of stoning—"let he who is without sin cast the first stone." Stones of condemnation fall from the hands of the religious leaders as they walk away. They expected Jesus to uphold the law by condemning the woman. Jesus offers forgiveness instead. "Go and sin no more," he tells her, holding her accountable for her behavior but not condemning her. Once again, Jesus behaves

contrary to the law, in a manner contrary to what the religious leaders expected.

Then there was the time Jesus received word his good friend Lazarus was seriously ill. Jesus responded, “this illness does not lead to death rather it is for God’s glory” and he stayed where he was two more days. Not the behavior the disciples expected from Jesus given the compassion he has shown to the multitudes. Not only is Jesus’ behavior unexpected it is disconcerting. Don’t we agree with the psalmist who writes, “incline your ear to me, O God, and answer speedily when I call.” “The glory of God will yet be revealed,” Jesus offers as explanation. Arriving at Lazarus’ home days later, Mary tells him her brother has been dead four days. “Take away the stone,” Jesus says after weeping over his dead friend. “Lazarus, come out,” Jesus commands. No one expected Jesus to say that? No one expected to see Lazarus appear at the door of the tomb wrapped in strips of cloth. No one expected Lazarus to be raised from the dead!

Throughout his life, Jesus did the unexpected. He drank wine at weddings, he ate with prostitutes and tax collectors, he shunned the religious authorities. When faced with upholding the laws of scripture or forgiving people Jesus chose people over the law time and time again. Jesus was not the Messiah people expected.

Throughout his life Jesus acted in ways that were not what people expected. He continued to act in unexpected ways the last week of his life. Jesus remained silent during his trial before Pilate. He did not fight back as the soldiers beat him, whipped him, thrust a crown of thorns upon his head and nailed him to a cross. As he hung upon the cross, Roman soldiers taunted him, “IF you are the Son of God, save yourself.” If you ARE the Son of God, save yourself. If you are the Son of God, **SAVE YOURSELF.**”

Scripture tells us, “Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”

What did you expect? Amen.