

Welcome

Do you know the Violent Femmes? If not, you surely know their song, “Blister in the Sun”. The Femmes released that song in 1983 on their debut album, and it’s one of those songs that has eclipsed the band’s own popularity. It’s been in movies, commercials, karaoke... it pops up everywhere.

The Femmes aren’t exactly a one-hit wonder. They have a passionate, loyal fanbase. They still release albums and tour - I actually got to see them here in Dallas a few years ago.

But unquestionably, “Blister in the Sun” has escaped the circle of their fanbase.

I’m always fascinated when a band has a song like that - what happens when you see them live? Most of them save that song for the encore - when we saw Sir Mix-a-Lot, he played “Baby Got Back” second to last (after asking us to stay to hear one more brand new song). And when we saw Leigh Nash - the singer of Sixpence None the Richer - a few years ago, she wove “Kiss Me” into the middle of her set, doing it as a stripped down, acoustic version.

I assumed the Femmes were going to do the same — play some of their favorites up front, fill the middle of the set with a few new songs and end — or maybe encore — with their big banger.

So I was pretty surprised when they *opened* with “Blister in the Sun.” Right out of the gate, here’s the song that blasted into the stratosphere.

I was surprised, but then I got the message: If you came here just to hear that song, you can go now. The rest of the concert is for the real fans.

It’s probably the most punk rock thing I’ve ever experienced at a concert. They knew exactly who they are, who their fans are, and what it means to have one of those songs that really blows up.

They also know they have a *career* for the fans who keep buying albums and support more than just that one song.

So they created a live experience that caters not to the one-hit-wonder fans, but to the fans of *the band*.

The Femmes illustrate what we see in Jesus in this last week of his life. He came to Jerusalem as God among the people, to show us what a truly faithful human life looked like in the face of the power of Rome and the collaboration of the urban elites.

And today — on Palm Sunday — Jesus is welcomed into the city by the throngs of peasants who have traveled to Jerusalem with him. They hailed him as the Messiah, which meant they had a very particular song they expected him to play.

But Jesus steadfastly refused to play any of the hits. He offered none of the classic Messiah songs. Because Jesus didn't let anyone else define what kind of Messiah he was. He came, if I can stretch this metaphor, to play the songs he wanted to play — the songs God gave him and no others.

Today, we're going to explore Jesus' entry into Jerusalem and what his faithfulness looked like in the midst of all those competing expectations about him. We'll ask what *our* expectations of Jesus look like, and whether we are listening for Jesus, or expecting him to sing our songs.

Message

Today is Palm Sunday. It's the last Sunday of Lent, which is a six-week journey we take with Jesus to the Cross. It's a season we set aside each year for introspection, a time to ask ourselves if we're living in faith, both as individuals and as a church family.

Our series this year is called Broken Promises. Each week, we've been exploring one of the covenants God made with the people in the Hebrew Bible. We've seen how - and why - the people failed to keep those covenants.

We've also seen how Jesus kept each of these covenants in his own life and ministry. This is a reminder for us that we're not in this journey alone. We're always following our leader, Jesus. It's *his* faithfulness that enables our life of faith. So we have the safety and security to explore our own failings. Jesus' love and faithfulness create space for us to be honest about our own sin so that we can confess it and turn to him.

Last week, we saw how the people's disillusionment with God was met with the promise of resurrection. Today, on Palm Sunday, this story is played out dramatically in Jesus' final week.

Think about a time you've had wrong expectations. Maybe it was for a political candidate you were sure was going to fix everything once they were in office. Or a conversation with an employer that didn't go like you expected. Anyone want to admit that differing expectations has caused some relational friction?

One of the first fights Amanda and I had when we were dating was over expectations - I would throw out something like, "Hey, you maybe want to get dinner Friday?" and she'd reply, "Yeah, that sounds good."

In my mind, we'd just made a plan. In her mind, we'd thrown out a possibility. I wouldn't mention it again until Friday, so she'd make other plans. When Friday came, I'd be hurt - I thought we'd made a plan! She was confused because I'd never followed up. We had to communicate, hear each other's perspectives and change our communication - be more direct - to avoid hurt in the future.

When we have wrong expectations, the results can be painful. They can be catastrophic.

These wrong expectations are at the heart of the story of Jesus' Triumphal Entry.

Turn with us to [Matthew 21](#).

This is Jesus' entry to Jerusalem. In Matthew's gospel, Jesus has spent his whole ministry - about 18 months - in the northern part of the country. He's been gathering a large following thanks to his teaching and healing, and people have been whispering that he's the Messiah, God's anointed champion who will overthrow the enemies of God's people and restore rule to God's people.

Imagine a politician spent a year and a half traveling all over the midwest - from Pennsylvania to Nevada, from Idaho and Montana to Mississippi and Alabama. Everywhere he went, he volunteered at schools and mobilized social services, and he did stump speeches about the real America that everyone had strayed from. So people start talking about him as the next Washington or Lincoln. And then you find out he's heading to Washington, D.C. - his first trip there ever - on July 4th weekend.

That's sort of the tone of Jesus' visit to Jerusalem. He came at Passover, which is when they celebrated the Exodus story — God liberating them from the evil empire.

So as we read this story, try to hold the expectations of the various groups in tension:

As Jesus and the disciples approached Jerusalem, they came to the town of Bethphage on the Mount of Olives. Jesus sent two of them on ahead. "Go into the village over there," he said. "As soon as you enter it, you will see a donkey tied there, with its colt beside it. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone asks what you are doing, just say, 'The Lord needs them,' and he will immediately let you take them."

This took place to fulfill the prophecy that said,

"Tell the people of Jerusalem,

'Look, your King is coming to you.

He is humble, riding on a donkey—

riding on a donkey's colt.' ”

The two disciples did as Jesus commanded. They brought the donkey and the colt to him and threw their garments over the colt, and he sat on it.

Most of the crowd spread their garments on the road ahead of him, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. Jesus was in the center of the procession, and the people all around him were shouting,

“Praise God for the Son of David!

Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the Lord!

Praise God in highest heaven!”

The entire city of Jerusalem was in an uproar as he entered. “Who is this?” they asked.

And the crowds replied, “It’s Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.” -- Matthew 21:1–11 (NLT)

Why was Jerusalem in an uproar?

Well first, everyone was afraid of Rome. Rome ruled with an iron fist, and didn’t take kindly to even whispers of insurrection. In fact, because it was Passover, the Roman governor Pilate had made a special trip to Jerusalem, entering Jerusalem from the West with a massive military parade.

Rome expected Jesus to be at best a coward and at worst another hapless rebel they’d have to crucify. Rome didn’t care if Jesus was reforming Judaism - they couldn’t have cared less about the religion of God’s people, so long as that religion remained a private thing. So long as they didn’t get political. It was when Jesus claimed to be a king, to come announcing God’s kingdom that Rome had a problem.

Speaking of those games, the citizens of Jerusalem expected Jesus to go along. Though in the abstract, they gave lip service to the idea of a Messiah, if he was going to show up, he’d come from among them, from the center of power.

Plenty of those in the capital had quit hoping for a Messiah. They’d figured out an accommodation to Rome’s rule, a way for their faith to thrive under the Empire’s shadow. It was the ancient equivalent of what we call today Christian Nationalism - a faith that is so detached from God’s way that it aligns itself with the Empire.

No wonder they couldn’t recognize God when he rode into town.

It's worth pausing her to reflect on our expectations of Jesus - we who live in the heart of the American Empire. Have we settled for an apolitical Jesus, one who can't afford to care about those on the margins for fear of upsetting those in positions of privilege and power?

Or is our Jesus so aligned with the culture around us that we can't see how he speaks truth to power?

Song

There's one more group we haven't explored - the pilgrims who arrived with Jesus. These are the folks who have heard his teachings, who have been healed or know someone he healed. The ones who are convinced he's the Messiah.

They've made this trip to Jerusalem with revolution in their hearts. They're convinced they're living through a new Exodus, that just as Moses stood against Pharaoh and announced, "Let my people go!" so long ago, now Jesus - with them at his back - with confront Pilate with a, "Don't let the door hit ya!"

That's why they welcome him into Jerusalem as a king - spreading palm branches and singing ancient patriotic songs. *They're* the ones making Pilate and the citizens of Jerusalem so nervous - because they're ready to take up arms and fight.

Jesus disappoints them, too.

Because he's not following their agenda, either. He's not here to be better at Rome's game than Rome. He's not here to out-Pharaoh Pharaoh.

Jesus is here to crack open the way we understand reality and flip it on its head. He's here to initiate a revolution in the truest sense of the word.

As we enter into Holy Week, it's worth asking what *our* expectations of Jesus are. After all, Jesus let down everyone in Jerusalem.

He refused to remain apolitical, like Pilate wanted.

He refused to buy into a nationalistic religion like the Jewish rulers in Jerusalem wanted.

And he refused to become another Caesar the way the pilgrims who travelled with him wanted.

So too with us. Do we want Jesus to offer us absolute freedom? Or will we trust that Jesus knows that true freedom comes with boundaries.

Do we want Jesus to be impressed with our hard work and ? Or will we trust that Jesus loves us all, even our enemies.

Do we want Jesus to...

Do we want Jesus to...

Do we want Jesus to meet our every need or do we trust that he is working for life and flourishing even when we can't see it?

Do we want Jesus to be on our side, or do we trust that Jesus is leading us to *his* side?

Friends, as we go into this Holy Week, this is the time for us to face that we've often felt as though God has let us down. It's good for us to be honest about that, because it's only then we can look for what God is up to, how God is present with us.

Communion + Examen

Jesus leads us to this table, then to a cross.

How have I seen God at work in my life during Lent?

Where have I felt disappointed by God in the last few weeks?

How can I express my disappointment with God *to* God this week?

How can I make space to be with Jesus this week?

Assignment + Blessing

Holy Week practices