

“I Didn’t Expect This”
Zechariah 9: 9-10
John 18: 33-37

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A number of weeks ago everyone who was in worship was invited to write down on a leaf the name of someone who had shared the gospel with them; someone who had influenced their faith in some way. The name that I wrote down was Charlie Durham. Charlie Durham was the pastor of my home church in North Carolina where I grew up. This is why I wrote his name down.

My freshman year of college was a struggle. I did not like it. I did not do well. I was on the Dean’s list. But it was the dean’s list you did not want to be on. It was the list that was if you get on too many times you were invited not to return. We are very polite in the south; you were *invited* not to return.

I was miserable. I went home after my freshmen year and I did not plan on going back. My homecoming was not exactly a joyous one. I came home, and then my grades came home. My dad was kind enough to let me prepare a defense. He gave me a little time to look at my grades and then came to talk about them.

First I said, “well, Dad, I was really busy...I mean I pledged the fraternity, I was playing on the rugby team. I was really busy.” Now if there are any college students present this morning, let me tell you right now, things like fraternities and rugby teams are not acceptable excuses to your parents. Do not try them.

So I went for another angle. I said, “Well, Dad, Wake Forest is a really hard school.”

He said, “You made a C in bowling...how do you do that?”

So my parents put me on this work release program. Everyday I would get up and there would be a list of things for me to do before I could leave the house. And it wasn’t things like empty the dishwasher and sweep off the porch. It was things like a truck will be dumping ten cubic yards of mulch in the driveway, have it spread before I get home. A truck will be delivering trees, please plant them in the specified locations. They did this thinking I might appreciate what I had, and that I would want to go back to school, but it didn’t work.

I didn’t want to go.

So my parents finally said, at their wits end, they said, “You know what, why don’t you go talk to Charlie.”

So I went. Sat down in his office and I poured my heart out to him. I laid it all out there, this is why I am so miserable, these are the poor decisions I made. This is the reason why I don't want to go back. And after about 20 minutes of just laying it all out there, I was done. I was emotionally drained. And he didn't interrupt me a single time. He listened to every word I said. And when I was done he smiled.

He looked at me and said, "I think I know what the problem is." He said, "You need to get off your tail and start doing some work."

"Excuse me?"

He said, "You are so afraid of failing that you would rather not try than to put your self out there and take a chance on not succeeding. Go back to college and get to work."

I was dumbfounded. I didn't expect this. I was sitting there thinking, "Where's the hug?" Where's the, "Your parent's don't understand your pain and suffering." Where's that? That was not what I expected. Not what I wanted. But exactly what I needed.

So I went back.

Now today on the calendar is Christ the King Sunday. A day that we pay tribute to the majesty, the royalty, the radiance that is Christ the Lord. There is a problem here. After all, is this really our King? Our King who wears a crown made of thorns instead of gold? Where's his palace? Our King's homeless. Where's the procession with the chariots and the bugles and the horses? Here comes our King; our King's on a donkey. Is this really our King?

How do we pay tribute to the majesty of this King? Some people would say, "Well, yes, he's different, but he's a much better King than any other king of this world." And I would disagree with that. I would disagree with that only because I think it's impossible to compare Jesus to any other king. Because Jesus himself said my kingdom is not of this world.

This world has never seen a king that would reign like Jesus; even good kings; even kings that might have actually cared about the people over whom they ruled. Their message was still so contrary to anything Christ would say because their message was still "Concur more, expand more, get more." This is not the message that Jesus has for us.

Our King would say something completely different. Our King would say, "Pour your life out. Give it away." It's not something we would expect from the King. The message of Jesus is that those who lose their lives will find them. Those who give everything away will find more than they can possibly imagine. It's not what you would expect from a king. And this is why some

people follow Jesus, because they loved it. They saw the hope in that. This is why so many others rejected him, because this doesn't make sense for our world. And it doesn't.

People couldn't get their heads around that. People still can't. I still struggle with how to worship Jesus on this day because I still try to look at him through the lens of how I would look at any other king. And that's exactly it; he's not like any other king. Jesus tells us to give ourselves away, to give our lives over to him, to pour our lives out so that others might be able to live.

In this message though, this message isn't simply this passive: I will reject more; I will say that I don't need anymore. This message that Jesus has is active, it's happening. As the prophet Zachariah says, this battle bow isn't simply laid down. This battle bow will be cut off. It's active.

Our King comes triumphant, victorious, humble, on a donkey. This isn't so much about how Jesus calls us how not to live. It's about how Jesus calls us to live. And that is to recognize that the King we serve has already served us. The King we serve calls us in our service to him to give our lives away to others, so that others may live.

It's an act of pursuit. It's not what we would expect. Sometimes it's not what we want because the message of getting more and expanding more and more and more and more, that's an easier message to hear. The message that Jesus gives us is sometimes not the message that we want; it stings. It stings because it opens up part of ourselves that we don't like to look at very often. But the hope of Christ's message is that opening that part that stings a little also opens the hope of something different: the hope of the Kingdom that is described by the prophet; the hope that can be found through the peace of our Lord; the hope that is found in the truth that Jesus proclaims.

It is not what we would expect from the King, but Jesus doesn't give us what we expect. Even in our gospel reading this morning, Pilate asks him a question and Jesus answers him. But what does Jesus answer? Jesus answers with a question. He does not give us what we expect. Sometimes he does not give us what we want, but he gives us exactly what we need. And that is the hope of a new and different world that can be found through his Kingdom.

Amen.