

The Day after Palm Sunday: *Mark 11:11-24*

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As Jesus entered Jerusalem, “Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting,

*Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!
Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!
Hosanna in the highest heaven!”*

Then he went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

That was Sunday.

But what happened on Monday?

Had Jesus been running for president, the cable news talk shows would be praising his campaign for a well-orchestrated event on Sunday. But then, on Monday, it all falls apart. Jesus goes off script. He commits a gaffe that undoes his last successful 24 hours, and it all spirals tragically out of control.

Of course, Jesus is not running for president. He’s the Messiah. But on Monday, he doesn’t seem like a Messiah. What is going on here?

It starts with Jesus being hungry. As they walk alongside the road, returning to Jerusalem from Bethany, he sees a fig tree. Nothing like fresh figs to satisfy your hunger. There’s only one problem. There are no figs on the tree. But it’s not because the tree is diseased or derelict. There are no figs because it’s not yet fig season.

If anyone should know this, Jesus should know this. But finding the fig-less tree, he curses the tree: “May no one ever eat fruit from you again!” And, “The disciples heard it.”

That would be enough, but the day keeps going. Soon, they return to the temple. Maybe Jesus is just in a bad mood because he’s still hungry. I get in a bad mood when I’m hungry. But Jesus, after taking a look around on Sunday, has returned to the temple with a plan. And when he enters the temple, he begins “to drive out those who were selling and those who were buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves; and he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple.”

Throwing over tables, he shouts: “Is it not written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations’? But you have made it a den of robbers.”

First he curses a fig tree without figs. Then he causes chaos in the temple. Does Jesus have an anger problem?

Seeing what he did at the temple, the chief priests and the scribes keep looking for a way to kill him. By the end of the week, they will find their way.

Later Monday evening, after the chaos of the day, Jesus and his disciples head back out of town to Bethany, a suburb a few miles outside of Jerusalem where Jesus liked to stay. And on the way, they pass again that cursed fig tree. "Look," Peter says. "That fig tree you cursed--it's dead!"

And what is Jesus' response? "Have faith in God. Have faith in God. Truly I tell you, if you say to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' and if you do not doubt in your heart, but believe that what you say will come to pass, it will be done for you. So I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours."

That's what happened on the day after Palm Sunday. It was a strange day. This is not what we expect from Jesus.

Of course, Jesus has been defying expectations since the gospel began. The first words Jesus speaks in the Gospel of Mark warns us of the unexpected that is coming: "The time is fulfilled. The kingdom of God has come near. Repent, and believe the good news."

In other words, a new age has dawn. This is a new season. Business as usual is over. If you expect things to stay the same, then you will be disappointed. Jesus shows up, and everything is turned on its head, as he introduces us to the "the kingdom of God."

From that point on, Jesus has encounter after encounter that defies our everyday expectations. People, whose lives have been out of season for years, encounter Jesus, and begin producing fruit out of season.

A Paralytic, unable to walk. His friends hear Jesus is in town, and want to take their friend to him, but it's too late. The crowds too large, and they can't get anywhere near Jesus. They might as well go home. What do you expect?

Suddenly, a hole appears in the roof, the stretcher is let down with the paralytic lying on it. "Stand up, take up your mat and go home!" And the man stands up for the first time in his life, and goes home, defying expectations, bearing fruit out of season.

A man named Jairus comes to Jesus. His daughter is sick, moments from death. "Can you heal her, Jesus?" But on the way, Jesus gets interrupted. He's delayed, and she dies. You might as well go home Jesus. There's nothing more to do. What do you expect?

But Jesus goes in with the dead girl. “She’s only asleep,” he calls out. And he takes her by the hand. “Little girl, get up!” And defying expectations, she gets up—she’s alive—bearing fruit out of season!

A man brings his boy to Jesus. He’s sick with a demon. “From childhood, the demon has tormented him. If you are able to do anything, have pity on us and help us.”

“If I am able? If I am able! All things are possible for the one who believes!” And Jesus heals the boy, defying expectations, and he bears fruit out of season.

And Jesus comes to a fig tree. He’s hungry. But there is no fruit. Business as usual.

And Jesus comes to the temple, a house of prayer for all people, but the money changers, and the dove-peddlers, and the religious leaders have turned worship into profit, and there is no place for the outcasts. All are not welcome there.

There is no fruit. Business as usual.

And Jesus curses the fig tree, and he curses the temple. Why? Because a new season has dawn, and there still is no fruit! Everyone is acting as if nothing has changed.

“Have faith in God,” Jesus says. “And truly I tell you, if you say to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and thrown into the sea,’ and if you do not doubt in your heart, but believe that what you say will come to pass, it will be done for you.”

In other words, expect the unexpected. Start believing that mountains can fly into the sea, and that paralytics can walk, and dead girls can live again, and trees can bear fruit out of season.

Believe the good news, that through God, all things are possible!

So, what would a church look like that believed this good news?

I imagine it would be a church filled with all kinds of people, people who looked different and talked different. It would be, quite literally, a house of prayer for all nations, where broken people come to find hope.

I imagine it would be a church where the old and the young are respected and treated with value, where everyone is treated like they were in season and have fruit to share.

I imagine it would be a church that sees suffering people in their community and dreamt of ways to help.

I imagine it would be a church that shares with one another when in need.

I imagine it would be a church that sees people, not as they are, but as they can be through the power of God.

I imagine that it would be a church that prays bold prayers, prayers of faith, prayers that could move mountains.

I imagine it would be a church that was always in season, always producing the fruit of hope, mercy and justice so that the world can eat of this fruit and life.

It sounds unbelievable, doesn't it? It's too much to expect, isn't it?

Yeah. It's unbelievable. What do you expect? But Jesus says, "Have faith in God!" Believe the good news, that in the kingdom of God, lives are transformed, churches bear fruit, and hope, mercy and justice are never out of season.

May God give us the grace to be an evergreen, always fruitful church, as we live in hope, as we treat others with mercy, and as we fight for justice in a world that is ready to bloom with the fruit of the kingdom of God.

Because the time is fulfilled.

In Jesus, the kingdom of God has come near, and it's all around us.

May we repent of our lack of imagination, and

Believe the good news.

Amen.