

## **“Expectations”**

(Luke 4:22-30)

Nestled within each one of us there is this place called, “expectation,” where we store everything, from what should happen in worship to how the Brewers will fare this spring to our sense of where we might find ourselves tomorrow. This eclectic collection of expectations are reflective of who we are as unique individuals and rarely do we stumble across another person’s storeroom of expectations that is organized in exactly the same way; nor does someone else’s storeroom contain the exact same contents. Expectations are formed out of an odd and age old recipe of reality and hopefulness. Expectations are formed out of our own individual life experiences with a healthy dose of our own distinctive dreams. For example, nestled within your storeroom you might expect for the pastor to provide challenging, theologically dense sermon while your pew mate might want the pastor to offer sermons with care and liberal references to chocolate while the person sitting behind you might be ready for this illustration to come to an end.

Our expectations make a difference in how we respond. Our expectations impact how we move about the world and what we say to others and how we relate. Now sometimes we are so clear on our expectations with each other; I expect Gina to give me honest feedback about my sermons and to share in my love of ice cream on Friday nights. Other times, we don’t name or claim our expectations for others or for ourselves. Now this might be because we don’t realize it is an expectation or we sense that naming it as such might compromise or bring conflict into the relationship. You see, one of my church expectations is for our worship to be life-giving and fill us with a sense of the sacred, what we do in this space on Sunday morning matters deeply to me. Another expectation I hold close is that before braving the cold of a January Wisconsin Sunday after worship it is good to share in a cup of coffee together; to be a community means we intentionally connect with each other and for some unknown, unexplainable biological reason it is easier to feel like a community with a cup of coffee in one hand and a brownie in the other. Hopefully, swirling around your mind right now are different expectations you have either for our church community or for friendships or significant relationships in your life.

But lets be honest, sometimes when we name an expectation out loud, it is not a “kum ba yah” kind of moment. We share what we hope might happen and the other person feels put upon or put out or put down by hearing our expectation. This is what happens when Jesus bumps smack against the expectations of those in the Nazareth synagogue that Sabbath service when he stood up to read scripture and offer a few words. People had heard rumors running along the verbal grapevine about how Jesus would heal those who were sick or cure those afflicted. And so, when the local boy turned wunderkind comes strolling back home, the expectation was that he would do all that and more for those who had nurtured him and watched him grow up. And why not, how many of us wonder to ourselves why the bright young adult who becomes a doctor doesn’t come back to Janesville to practice or are we a bit frustrated by the promising protégé who chooses a warmer climate to teach. We feel rejected or we feel angry or hurt wells up within because of a relationship that now feels broken.

Jesus had been in Capernaum, a town to the north of Nazareth, a town where more Gentiles than Jewish folk lived; and he had healed and ministered there. Our storeroom of

expectations shares at least an adjoining wall, if not some space, with our sense of pride. And so, when the people heard that he ministered in a place that some felt was inferior to receiving God's grace and love that Jesus had ministered and cured people looked down upon, it was not just their expectations that got trampled, it was also their pride. They wondered, why didn't Jesus come to us first? And Jesus looks out at the congregation and offers not a compassionate, reassuring answer to calm their anxieties; but instead a confrontational, pot stirring, emotionally charged re-iteration that he will not be confined by people's expectations.

Three times Jesus comes at the people, first with this phrase about "Doctor, cure yourself." Now this was an oft-quoted proverb both by Jewish and Greek writers that basically amounted to show us the goods. You have been healing folks Jesus well let's see some of that here in your home town. Jesus refuses. And then, he brings up Elijah being sent to the widow at Zarephath in Sidon; a foreigner in Elijah's day, not one of the prouder moments in Israel's history. And then, just in case some one did not quite understand, Jesus closes with Elisha (who took over after Elijah swung low on a chariot and was carried away) who cured not just a foreigner named Naaman, friends Naaman was a powerful general of a foreign army. Again, not exactly a memory people want to be reminded of; especially in a sermon.

So, with the storeroom of expectations in disarray and in ruins, the people in the synagogue respond (as we so often can still today) with violence. They chase Jesus out of the pulpit, threaten to throw him off a hill; and in perhaps the most anticlimactic ending within scripture, we are told that Jesus just strolls right through the crowd. Now I love images as much as the next person. I get that this is reminiscent of Moses parting the sea or even a foreshadowing of Jesus death and resurrection when people's anger again will rise up and create violence and again God will move in mysterious ways I don't fully understand. But, couldn't Luke have offered something a bit more realistic, like saying the people were struck and could move or I don't know have Jesus fly away like Superman. Friends, the gospels don't ever conform or kowtow to our expectations. The gospels are meant to challenge us and even cause us to change our lives and understandings dramatically. It is not supposed to make sense in a way that we can file away in our rational storerooms, neat and tidy. The gospels invite us into the messiness of human life, because that is where we live every moment here on earth.

And the claim of the gospels is this is where God meets us most often. Not in happy, Disney-like endings where everything is wrapped up and no loop holes are left, but perhaps God meets us in the world in those places that don't make sense; that confound us and even confuse us. Ever since the earthquake in Haiti happened, I can't shake the images from my mind or the sense that there might be possibilities for relationships, authentic relationships beyond a check or cash donation to spring forth with resurrection light; not immediately or according to my time table, but with an openness to God's grace. So, I keep talking to people like Diane, praying, I keep thinking about different possibilities; because there is something in my heart and stirring in my soul that will not let me go. What exactly I am expecting, I am not completely sure. But sometimes, the best expectations are ones that are written with God's grace guiding you into the mystery of what will be tomorrow and not found in the storeroom within. God meets us in the untidy, messy middle of life and there starts to plant seeds of what might be.

So, may you be aware of your expectations for yourself, for God, for others and for our church community. May you notice when the storeroom is ruffled by the actions of others or when an expectation just doesn't seem to fit in the place where it once did fit. May we, as a church and people of deep faith, be willing to let go of expectations that create harm, even when there is not a readily available replacement. And may our expectations keep responding to the world we live in, the people who brush up against our lives and our hearts, and most of all may our storeroom of expectations remain open to God's presence in this world right here, right now. Thanks be to God and let the people of God say, "Amen!"