



BAPTISM OF OUR LORD

JANUARY 13, 2019

LUKE 3: 15-17, 21-22

“NO EXPECTATIONS”

The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Messiah. John answered them all, “I baptize you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”

- Before a woman turns forty, she has the following expectations of a man:
 - Handsome
 - Charming
 - Financially successful
 - A caring listener
 - Witty
 - Physically fit
 - Dresses with style
 - Full of thoughtful surprises
 - A romantic partner
- After forty, a woman’s expectations change a bit. She wants a man who is:
 - Not too ugly
 - Doesn’t belch or scratch in public
 - Works most days
 - Doesn’t nod off while she’s talking
 - Remembers the punch lines of his jokes
 - Is in good enough shape to rearrange the furniture
 - Usually wears matching socks and clean underwear
 - Remembers to put the toilet seat down
 - Shaves on weekends
- **Expectations are premeditated resentments.** Once we come to the decision that a person, event, or situation is going to be as we think it should be, we set ourselves up for resentment.

- I looked up the definition of resentment: **bitter indignation at being treated unfairly.**
- That's pretty negative stuff!
- And one particular guy jumped into my mind at this point in writing this sermon.
- A man in one of my congregations who only came to church on Christmas Eve and Easter, likely because his mother made him, although he was in his fifties by this point. Always looking as though he had just eaten a bag of lemons sprinkled with hot sauce.
- When he was a young adolescent, his older brother, maybe nineteen, an electrician's apprentice, grabbed the wrong wires and instantly was killed. A tragic accident.
- From that point on, his life was dominated by resentment because life was not as he expected it should have been. So, hatred toward god, who he expected should have somehow prevented his brother's accident. Resentment toward life for dealing him such a lousy hand (althoughh a better hand than his brother's). Resentment toward his mother for who knows what. Just a bitter, resentful man. At this point, clearly alcoholic, eventually fired from his management-level job for sexually inappropriate behavior in a public place with an employee. For which he became even more resentful. And why would he have expected anything different?
- Resentment is bitter indignation at being treated unfairly.
- The gospel tips us off we got trouble brewing when it begins today with **"the people were waiting expectantly."** Oh boy.
- And then John the Baptizer increases the expectations by describing who he thinks the Messiah will be: "he will baptize you with the holy spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."
- Clearly, John's expectation of Messiah's arrival on the scene is based on the *God Image* of a jealous, angry, judging deity portrayed, at times, in the Old Testament. John expects the Messiah to be a vengeful leader who will smash his enemies.

- And who comes? Jesus, the vengeful warrior? No, the Prince of Peace. Jesus, the wild man of Borneo? No, the Lamb of God. Jesus, the angel of death? No, the Bread of Life. Jesus, the angry king? No, the Good Shepherd.
- If we look at all the stories about John in the Gospels, John struggles constantly over his expectations of Jesus.
- His disciples frequently fast and pray, as do the Pharisees, so all these religious leaders do the same thing. But the disciples of Jesus eat and drink and don't go around praying in public, as John **expects** them to do. John and his disciples are strict about their personal behavior, but Jesus and his disciples are clearly so free-wheeling that Jesus is accused of being a drunk and a glutton.
- **Expectations are premeditated resentments.**
- A spiritual teaching story about expectations and resentments goes like this:
- Moses meets an angel of God and Moses asks the angel if he might accompany him. The angel agrees, but fears that Moses will not be able to accept the angel's deeds because Moses has such strong expectations. He tells Moses that if he gets resentful along the way, the angel will have to leave him. Moses agrees.
- Soon the angel and Moses come to a fishing village and the angel cuts holes in all the boats and they sink to the bottom. Moses is indignant, but keeps his mouth shut, seething inside. They continue on their way.
- A handsome young man approaches Moses and, without warning, the angel kills the young man. Moses is outraged, berating the angel for such an evil deed. The angel says, "I knew you would not be able to bear with me," but Moses keeps walking with the angel.
- Finally, they reached a town of unbelievers and evildoers and the angel repairs the crumbled wall around their city at no charge to the heathen.
- Moses has had enough. After indignantly railing at the angel, Moses vows to leave.
- The angel replies, "I knew you would not be able to walk the way with me. But before you leave, allow me to explain my actions."

- “A terrible storm was on the way and I knew the villagers depended on their boats to make their living fishing. By sinking their boats, I prevented them from being destroyed by the storm. Afterward, it would be easy for the villagers to draw up their boats, repair them, and thus save their livelihood.”
- “The handsome young man was on his way to murder his parents. By killing him, I saved their lives and, perhaps, saved the young man’s soul.”
- Buried under the crumbled wall was the fortune of two pious men. By restoring the wall of the heathen, I enabled the young men to dig up their fortune.”
- **Expectations are premeditated resentments**, built upon the narrow and prejudicial view of our individual egos. Leading us to false judgments, leading us to call good evil and evil good, and leading us to oppose the presence of god in our lives.
- **John shows us that expectations so often are based on our past experience that is no longer applicable to the present situation.**
- This is why Jesus calls John the greatest among those born of women, but the least in the kingdom of God.
- John is the figure in the New Testament who most fully embodies the teaching of the Old Testament. But this knowledge of the **past** religious tradition no longer serves him or the rest of the people.
- Again, based on past knowledge, John expects a God of vengeance, not a God of forgiveness. Based on past experience, John expects some kind of spiritual general who will overthrow the rule of the Roman Empire, not a God of peace. Based on past knowledge, John expects a God of wrath who burns the unrighteous in a hellish furnace, not a God who accepts and loves sinners.
- If we hear John’s story symbolically as spiritual wisdom for all of us, how does the story end?
- With John losing his head. That is, he must lose his head—his mind—his endless stream of thoughts and feelings of how it should be--of narrow, past-based, and erroneous expectations.

- The Gospel message proclaims: **off with all our heads** when we are controlled by our expectations that are just waiting to become resentments!
- Who said, “My happiness grows in proportion to my acceptance, and in inverse proportion to my expectations?”
- Michael j. Fox, who developed Parkinson’s at an early age.
- Who said, “When one’s expectations are reduced to zero, one really appreciates everything one does have?”
- Stephen j. Hawking, who lived his entire adult life with ALS and a genius mind trapped in a shell of a body.
- The big book of Alcoholics Anonymous contains this wisdom,
“I could see how life was, but I couldn’t stand it. I was always feeling like a victim because people and life were not acting in the way I believed they ‘should’ act.”
- “By having expectations, I was giving power away. In order to be empowered i had to own that I had choices about how I viewed life, about my expectations. I realized that no one can make me feel hurt or angry—that it is my expectations that cause me to generate feelings of hurt and anger.”
- The most insidious level of expectations for me had to do with my expectations of myself. The ‘critical parent’ voice in my head was always berating me for not being perfect, for being human. My expectations, the ‘shoulds’, my disease piled on me were a way in which I victimized myself.”
- If i wrote an eleventh commandment, it might be “lighten up on yourself.” But i guess that would just be my expectation!
- Nevertheless, acceptance is the answer. When we are disturbed, it is because we conclude that some person, thing, situation, or some fact of our life is unacceptable. Something is not meeting our expectations.
- Serenity is acceptance of the person, place, situation, or fact in front of us.

- Things outside of our own lives don't need changing. We need to be changed. **Off with our heads!**
- Reaching the end of a job interview, the H.R. person asked a young engineer, "What starting salary are you looking for?"
- The engineer replied, "In the neighborhood of \$125,000, depending on the benefits package."
- The H.R. woman said, "Well, what would you say to five weeks vacation, fourteen paid holidays, full medical and dental, a company matching retirement fund to 50% of your salary, and a company car leased every two years, say, a Corvette."
- The engineer sat up straight and said, "Wow! Are you kidding?"
- "Yeah, but you started it."
- If we have expectations that life will be fair we will become resentful.
- Demanding that life meet our expectations is a perfect recipe for a miserable life.
- For life is a game with no rules. Life happens to each of us in a very particular and peculiar way, regardless of our best intentions.
- The path to serenity lies in being open to receiving whatever life throws at us.
- Acceptance with gratitude.
- No expectations.
- SERMON SONG: **WHEN I'M SIXTY-FOUR** BY THE BEATLES