

SERMON FOR SUN. DEC. 12, 2021

Advent 3C 2021 Luke 7 “Great Expectations”

Dear fellow redeemed of, by and for Christ, Christmas is a season of great expectations. But expectations can be dangerous things. When expectations are *met*, they result in great joy, but can cause great disappointment when they aren't.

For example, the child who gets what they expect for Christmas is a happy camper, while the child who does not is bitterly disappointed.

In today's Gospel lesson John the Baptist sends a couple of his disciples to Jesus with an expectant question: **“Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for [or expect] another?”**

It seems to be is a strange question, coming from John. He was well acquainted with Jesus and was present His Baptism, when God the Father proclaimed Jesus to be His **“beloved Son, with whom [He was] well pleased.”**

John had pointed at Jesus and boldly proclaimed, **“Behold, the Lamb of God.”** So why now does he send some disciples to Jesus to ask this apparently doubt filled question?

Is John wavering in his faith? Or do the disciples that he sends need to be sure of who Jesus is?

Is Jesus not living up to expectations?

Well, it'd be perfectly understandable if John was having a crisis of faith. Especially given the fact that he'd been rotting in Herod's prison for who knows how long.

But John's doubt isn't what lay behind the question his disciples ask. John had said, **Jesus must increase, and I must decrease.** John's followers should be attached to Jesus, not to him. John's job was to point others to Jesus, it wasn't done yet if he still had followers clinging to him.

So he sends a couple of his remaining disciples to ask Jesus **“Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for [or expect] another?”**

John knew the answer. He knew Jesus was the promised Messiah. But his disciples needed to know it too, so they would know where their hope lay when John was gone. Who would they cling to then? John hopes it's Jesus.

But it is not only John's disciples who need to know where to turn when the chips are down – *so do we.*

Why? Because maybe *your* life isn't living up to what *you* expected. Perhaps you thought the Christian life would be different than what you've experienced – more dynamic, more holy, more joyful, less ordinary.

But instead, like John, you're locked up in prison. Only for you it is not a literal prison, but the prison of your humdrum, day-to-day life; or the prison of your dead end job; or the prison of loneliness, or the prison of fractured family relationships.

So perhaps you think to yourself, is this all there is to the Christian life? Why doesn't Jesus take care of His own? Why don't I feel His presence more? Why does it seem as if nothing is happening in my life? Or, why is what is happening all wrong?

But what is wrong? Jesus, or our expectations? Well, let me clue you in; it's not Jesus.

Our expectations are marred by sin. Our expectations are long on happiness and short on scuffling, much less taking up our cross and following Jesus. **PAUSE**

In response to the question of John's disciples, Jesus doesn't defend Himself – instead, He reminds them what the prophet Isaiah said would be signs that the Messiah had come.

They will know that Jesus the one they are to look to and cling to because He is doing exactly what was foretold: **“The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have the good news preached to them.”**

Jesus is fulfilling God's promised plan of salvation: He is indeed the Lamb of God who is taking the sins of the world. That is why His Father is well pleased.

But Jesus not only addresses the disciples of John and their expectations – He then turns to the crowds, listening to all this, and asks them, and us, questions.

First, Jesus asks: **What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind?** Put into a 21st century form, the question would be: *what did you come here to church today to hear? What did you expect?*

A message which changes depending on how the winds of modern opinion are blowing?

A message that will bend and change to tell you what you want to hear? A message that you're okay and success is right around the corner?

If that's why you came, you will be disappointed.

Jesus then continues: **What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing?**

Or for us today that would be: *what did you come here expecting to hear? A health and wealth message of success, ease and privilege? If so, you will be disappointed.*

So: **What then did you do out to see? A prophet? Yes!**

I pray that you have come to hear the Word of God in truth. I pray that you've come to have me point you to the Lamb of God who came not to indulge you, but to save you.

If so, you will not be disappointed! For though it may not be what **you want to hear, it is what you need to hear.**

And this message first is a message of **repentance**.

For what? For my false expectations. For being ashamed to confess Jesus before your neighbors. For being too selfish to act, too reluctant to go out of my way for others.

For being too self-centered to consider the good that God is doing through the cross he's laid on you because you're so focused on trying to get out from underneath it. For believing the wisdom of the world and not the wisdom of God.

For the **audacity** of being disappointed with God not living up to my expectations when I fall so far short of His. So yes, ***first, the message is one of repentance.***

But then the message spoken here is also one of **forgiveness!** That our sin, death, and unwillingness to take up our crosses have been dealt with!

That Jesus ***is the one who was to come*** – the Lamb of God who took away our sin.

The Lamb who came to take our sin and death upon Himself on the cross and give us the life of His resurrection in exchange.

Jesus comes to us this morning to open our ears to hear His Word, to open our eyes to see His goodness, even in the face of adversity, to heal us from the leprosy of our sin, and to preach this Good News to we poor miserable sinners gathered here.

It's good news especially when we are faced with death, whether it be ours or our loved ones so that we know where our hope lies. That Jesus is the One, and there *is* no other.

And then, with His forgiveness, we hear the message of **new life** in Him. That the eternal life He has promised us is not just something far off in the future, but is His gift to us already now!

For in Baptism, you have already died to the old and been raised to the new. The wealth of Heaven has been given to you.

And so the life that you now live is different – not the same old life, with the same old expectations, with the same old sin – but a new life.

A life of service and forgiveness and love. The life of Christ. For Christ lives in you.

And as your faith in Jesus increases, *you* do not decrease – you increase too! In faith, in hope, and love. No matter where you are, no matter the struggle, no matter what seems to be.

For your life is no longer in the false expectations and perishable things of this world, **but your life is hidden with Christ in God.**

And as great as John is – and he *is* great! Jesus said of him, ***among those born of women, none is greater than John.***

But as great as John is – did you hear? – ***Jesus calls you greater.*** Greater are those for whom Christ has done great things!

Greater are those who receive His absolution, who eat and drink His body and blood, who receive His forgiveness and life that no struggle, no prison, no death can take away.

And that is what Christmas is all about. The advent of our Savior. The One *come* to serve us with His very life.

The Greatest One of all who came to become nothing, so that we who are nothing might be made great.

Yes, He is the One who came and is coming again.

So that we, as we heard from St. Paul, would **not be anxious about anything, but rejoice always.** Rejoicing in our Savior and the wonders of His love. **AMEN**