



July 5, 2020

Good Morning Bethany Worshippers,

Welcome to worship this morning! My expectation is that you will find our worship service today to be one of spiritual value and importance. I use the word “expectation” because that is the theme of the sermon message. We all go through life having expectations about many things. One expectation that many worshippers have about worship is that they seek to encounter God in some way. While this encounter may be not foremost in one’s mind as they come to worship, I believe it is always a motivating factor in our desire to worship. The desire to encounter God is woven into the fabric of our being as people created in the image of God.

So, while today’s message zeros in on the disappointment of expectations not being met, I hope and pray that the expectation of encountering God through worship is, for you, one that is met. From there, however, the expectation of what that encounter may be like is open to all kinds of possibilities. Encountering God can be exhilarating, it can be challenging, it can be enlightening, it can raise more questions for you than answers. So, my pastoral advice is to always be expectant of an encounter with God, but don’t carve out too distinctly any expectation of what that encounter may be like.

Today we welcome Kristan back you provide us with some music for this worship service. Music always enhances the worship experience. So, we are grateful, not only for Kristan’s talent, but also that she is able to share it with us. Stay well, keep the faith, be prayerful, and always know that God’s presence is with you as you make your way through each day.

Worship well,

Pastor Rick

WORSHIP July 5, 2020

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cGvQj3twQDo>

(Click on the link to watch worship service)

GREETING AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

PREPARATION FOR WORSHIP

CALL TO WORSHIP

We gather this day to worship!
But we bring with us heavy burdens which weigh us down.
We gather this day to praise God!
But our hearts ache inside us and we feel tired and weary.
Come all who are burdened and who feel weighed down. Come to Jesus.
Lord Jesus, take our burdens and heal our spirits. AMEN.

A BRIEF CONFESSION

Lord have mercy.
We have missed the mark of your desire for our lives.
Christ have mercy.
We have not turned ourselves around from patterns of living contrary to your will.
Lord have mercy.
Forgive, renew, and guide us into a newness of life in Christ Jesus.
God forgives, Christ renews, and the Holy Spirit guides us to life anew.
Live now, as the redeemed People of God.

GREETING

The Lord be with you
Bring your life before God in this time of worship.
Bring your life and all of who you are ... to God!

SCRIPTURE READINGS

1st Reading – Psalm 145:8-14

The Lord is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
The Lord is good to all,
and his compassion is over all that he has made.
All your works shall give thanks to you, O Lord,
and all your faithful shall bless you.
They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom,
and tell of your power,
to make known to all people your mighty deeds,
and the glorious splendor of your kingdom.
Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,
and your dominion endures throughout all generations.
The Lord is faithful in all his words,
and gracious in all his deeds.
The Lord upholds all who are falling,
and raises up all who are bowed down.

Gospel reading – Matthew 11:16-19, 27-30

'But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the market-places and calling to one another, "We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn." For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, "He has a demon"; the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, "Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax-collectors and sinners!" Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.'

All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

'Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.'

SERMON

Pentecost 5

EXPECTATIONS
Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

July 5, 2020

The African American novelist and poet, Alice Walker wrote in one of her



poems ...

screen 1 *Expect nothing. Live frugally*

on surprise ... the upshot of which means that our expectations are usually overly optimistic and surprises are always instructive.

It would have been helpful to Jesus if Alice Walker

lived in his time and that the people of the towns where Jesus taught and did ministry read Ms. Walker's poem and pondered its meaning as they tried to figure Jesus out.

Expect nothing. Live frugally on surprise

There was a book written by the great English novelist, Charles Dickens



Screen 2

called *Great Expectations* ... you've probably heard of it, maybe even seen it in movie form or as a play.

It's a long multi-layered story, but one of the themes running through it all, is that our expectations never really pan out as we thought they would, surprise rather seems more certain.

It would have been helpful, perhaps, if the people in the towns where Jesus taught and did ministry read the book *Great Expectations* as they tried to understand Jesus and weigh in on the weight of his words and deeds.

EXPECTATIONS can get us into trouble, especially when we

cling to them ... when we cling to an expected way that life has to go,
 when we cling to an expected way that our life has to be structured,
 crafted, and
 put together.

OK ... that might sound a little bit too philosophical, but we're all philosophers (you see) as we struggle to attach meaning to our lives and what's happening around us ... especially when expectations are not met.

This is precisely what's going on in the reading from the 11th chapter of Matthew we hear this morning ... expectations of the messiah have not squared very well with the reality of who Jesus is.

Before we get into that, let me share with you

a very simple, yet true, story that I hope will help prepare a pathway by which we can seek to understand these verses from Matthew's 11th chapter that hear this morning.

It's the story of Rev. Jones (we'll call him) ... a Presbyterian minister back in the 1950's. According to church members, he was a wonderful pastor, a terrific preacher, had a great personality, and everybody loved him. But one day, Rev. Jones' ministry in that church suddenly came to a crashing end.

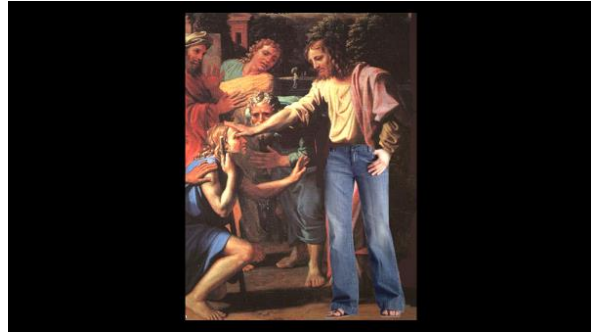
You might wonder, what could have happened? Did he get caught stealing money from the church? Was he involved in some matter of infidelity with another woman and suddenly left his wife? Turns out, it wasn't anything like that. Turns out that what brought Rev. Jones ministry to an end at that church happened on a **particular October Saturday afternoon**. Some church members saw Rev. Jones walking down the main street of town wearing a sweatshirt and blue jeans. This is a true story I want to remind you.

Apparently, in that community, back in the 1950's, people had a pretty clear expectations of what a minister was supposed to wear all the time ... and a guy walking down the street wearing a sweatshirt and blue jeans wasn't it.

EXPECTATIONS ... In a way (in a more complicated way) this is the same kind of issue that Jesus faced.

I don't think Jesus

ever walked down the streets of Nazareth or Jerusalem in a sweatshirt & jeans ... if he did, it might have looked something like this.

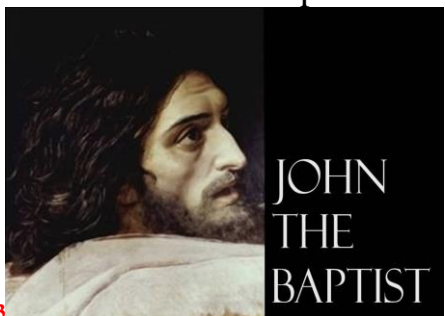


Screen 3

But it seems, the people in his day had a pretty clear picture in their minds of what the Messiah was supposed to look like,
act like, and
be like ... and, well, Jesus wasn't it.

Let's get a little context here by looking at the whole of chapter 11

It starts with John the Baptist



Screen 3

who was arrested and in prison at the time ... he asks the question concerning Jesus: ***“Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?”***

Or to put it more bluntly: ***“Jesus, are you the one God has sent us, because you aren't exactly what I thought we were looking for?”***

John the Baptist was what you might call a **“fire & brimstone”**

sort of preacher ... he stood on the banks of the Jordan River and hollered at the top of his lungs for people to repent & change their ways or God's wrath was coming.

He probably thought,
 that when the Messiah came ... that this person would be even more a **“fire & brimstone”**
 preacher than he was.

Instead, Jesus comes
 blessing the little children,
 telling the tax collectors & sinners that God loves them ... Jesus didn't quite match the
 expectation that John the Baptist had in mind for what the Messiah should be like.

EXPECTATIONS

Later on, in the chapter in chapter 11

Jesus minces no words when railing against the cities where he's traveled to do ministry
 and the people in those cities refused to believe in him.

And it's the same story

Jesus didn't match the expectations of what they had in mind

for what the Messiah was supposed to be like ... They were put off by the fact that Jesus spent
 so much of his time hanging out with the
 “wrong” sort of people;

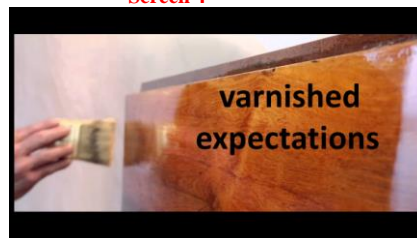
They were put off by the fact that instead of
 spending time with the “good” people, the
 religious people and patting them on the
 back ... Jesus went out of his way to
 socialize with the “bad” people
 telling them how God cared
 about them, called for them to
 change, how God forgave them.

EXPECTATIONS ... they can get us into trouble

And the trouble they get us into happens, seems to me,

when *somehow* we convert our expectations into unbending truths of how life needs to be

and should be ... it's as though we varnish our expectations ... That's right – varnish our expectations



Once varnished, they become

a hardened version of what we want life to be like ... and nothing better mess with it/challenge it/or upset it – THIS version of life we construct with varnished expectations.

The expectation of the “Messiah” was a *varnished one*

with generations of tradition & teaching that pretty well outlined how the Messiah would come and what he would be like ... and Jesus didn't fit the bill in this regard, he upset messianic expectations.

But Jesus, you see, was doing what God had done

throughout all of scripture ... blowing apart *varnished expectations* and working instead

through *surprise*

Screen 5

surprise

Abraham & Sara in their old age never expected to have a child but then Isaac was born ... surprise!

The inarticulate Moses never expected to be a leader, but God chose him to lead the Israelites out of Egypt to escape their slavery ... surprise!

Jeremiah saying to God that he's just a boy and doesn't know how to speak never expected to be God's prophet, God calls him any way and he becomes one of the major prophets of the Bible ... surprise!

One would never expect the Messiah of the world to be born in a stable, to an unwed teenager, and then become an itinerant preacher living very simply and amassing no wealth ... surprise!

Then the death of this Messiah would seem to put to an end even humble messianic expectations – AH BUT THEN the resurrection comes and Jesus continues to live to this day in the lives of those who receive him ... surprise!

Let's transport the lesson of our reading today about expectations from Matthew's 11th chapter ... let's bring it over to something more current to see how varnished expectations can be (at least) disrupted making room for God's surprise.

About thirty years ago, I had been invited to experience a worship service

at the congregation I had just accepted the call to be their new pastor ... I didn't have to

preach or lead worship in anyway, just come and worship like a regular parishioner would.

So, on that Sunday morning I put on my best suit and tie (no clerical collar) ... sat

somewhat toward the back like a good Lutheran is trained to do and visually scanned the

sanctuary as to its layout and I scanned the people trying to discern a corporate personality.

Everything met

my expectations ... The church had a "church smell" particular to this sanctuary.

The decorum was typical of a church built in the late 1800's

- a chancel area (with a railing forming a semi-circle around it) was set back from the pews;
- the pulpit was set high above the pews and one entered the pulpit through a door directly behind it;
- altar permanents and wall banners were very traditional;
- the people ... the people looked like and dressed like people coming to church in a small mid-western town;
- they were friendly with each other and talked a lot about the weather.

Worship began in typical Lutheran fashion ... just what I expected:

traditional language,

traditional hymns,

nothing out of the ordinary.

Then came time

for the collection (as it was called) and the musical offering that accompanied it ... this is when

things veered off the rails a bit as to normal expectations.

Some guy strolled down the aisle (he was

sitting further back than me because I didn't see him when I scoped out the people before the service began).

He strolled down the aisle in a tank top,
faded blue jeans, and
red tennis shoes, he reminded me of Hulk Hogan the wrestler



Screen 6

minus a little less muscle mass.

He sat down at the piano and pumped out a “bluesy” rendition of, Amazing Grace,
the likes of which I never heard in church before ... and I wondered if this was normal for this
congregation, or was everybody as surprised as I was.

Turns out, it was his debut at the church too ... so I guess everyone was surprised, the
interim Pastor met him, learned of his musical talent, and asked him to play in church
that Sunday and he did.

After I got started the church about a month later, I looked this guy up,

I wanted to see if I could get him plugged into the congregation in some way,

He said, *“I’m not much of a church goer ... what do you have in mind.”*

I said, *“I don’t know ... maybe sing some more?”*

He said, *“You sure the people like that kind of singing?”*

I said, *“I don’t know ... let’s give it a try”*

As the story goes ... Dave (that was his name) did sing many more times at the church.

The people did like his bluesy country style.

As I learned more about him, he played the drums and did back-up vocals
for the Sonny and Cher Show back in the early 1970’s, got mixed-up with
drugs and alcohol, which ended his starlit career.

He never did come to church very much for worship, but always came to play the piano and

sing when I asked him ... the surprise came, though, when he wanted to get an AA group started
and asked me if the church would offer space for them to meet.

We did that ... and soon the

meetings were drawing a good number of people and to my knowledge, the AA group still
meets at that church and it’s been over thirty years since then.

It's not a surprise that Dave wanted to start a twelve-step group considering his history.

It is a surprise, though, that his unexpected musical debut where he shattered expected appearances and sounds ... that this debut eventually led to the starting of an AA group to serve and help folks caught in the grip of substance abuse.

Somehow ... the disruption of expectations when Dave sang in church that particular Sunday morning; and the surprise that it eventually lead to the initiating of a 12-step group ... somehow, that all resonates, so well, with Jesus concluding words we hear this morning.

'Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.

Life these days for most all of us is not what we expected it to be like

in the year 2020 ... a pandemic,
a reckoning for race relations in America and across the world,
a sheltering in place and wearing masks.

This is not what we expected to be
living through as we worship today on this fifth day of July ... a day after a much
different fourth of July celebration that was not what we wanted and expected it to be

When our expectations are challenged, God can work surprises ... the line of events,
from disrupted expectations to God's surprise is usually **NOT** a straight one; but more
likely, a convoluted one that brings us to some experience of God's grace.

So,
Be ready,
Be open, and
Be an active working part of God's surprise ... as we live and work through our shattered
expectations about how life should go.
Grace and healing are what God seeks
to bring us amid times such as these.

AMEN

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.
He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit
and born of the Virgin Mary.
He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried.
He descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again.
He ascended into heaven,
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church*,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

God of unfailing love ... We live in the midst of times when our expectations of how life should go are being challenged and upended. Help us, we pray, to learn more of your grace when we are challenged in such ways. Give us vision to see more clearly what your desire for our lives and for the world is to be. Enlighten us in the midst of much that we do not understand, to release expectations that no longer serve the common good. Empower us to embrace new ways of living and thinking that lead to more wholesome and dignified way of living with each other. In your grace and love Lord ... hear our prayer.

God of unfailing love ... We yearn for peace, yet do not know very well how to bring it forth. And so, we pray for peacemakers that you give them wisdom and energy to bring cooperation out of discord. We pray for those living amid violence that they can be sustained until peace is procured. We pray for the hungry, the homeless, and the refugee that we of blessed means will provide where there is need. In your grace and love Lord ... hear our prayer.

God of unfailing love ... We pray for Bethany members on our prayer list. Give them the blessing of your presence amid their times of trial. We pray for our congregation in this time of suspended worship that we will still continue to be a committed community of faith seeking to be the light of Jesus in our community and world. In your grace and love Lord ... hear our prayer.

God of unfailing love ... We pray for our world in a time of pandemic and societal distress and change. Give our leaders wisdom, compassion, insight, and courage to lead in ways that serve all the people under their charge. We pray for doctors and nurses, EMT's, and all those on the frontline of healthcare amid this COVID-19 pandemic. Give them health, energy, compassion, and the strength to care for those struggling with illness and hospitalization. In your grace and love Lord ... hear our prayer.

Listen to each of us, Lord, as we come to you in a moment of silent prayer

Into your hands, great and compassionate God, we commend all for whom and about which we pray, trusting in your mercy through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

OFFERING *(Please mail your weekly offering to the church - 4300 N 82nd St. Scottsdale, AZ 85251)*

PRAYER OF BLESSING

P Let us pray:

C **In the wonder of your abundance, O Lord, we are blessed with the gifts of life. Teach us generosity to give where there is need. Teach us compassion to give where there is hurt. Teach us love to give where there emptiness. You are a God of abundance; teach us to live abundantly in service to you.**
AMEN

THE LORD'S PRAYER

You may say traditional Lord's Prayer or use the Aramaic translation printed below or you may say both in succession

*O Creator, the one who gave birth to the universe,
You are the sacred source of our being.*

*Focus Your ways, Your light, within us.
Make us useful for Your purposes here on earth so that
Your desire and our lives become one.*

Grant what we need each day in bread and insight.

*Loosen the cords of mistakes binding us,
as we release the strands we hold of other's guilt.*

*Do not let surface things delude us, snare us, and lead us away
from You and Your purpose.*

*But free us from what holds us back, give us power to
live as you intended and created us to live.*

*From You comes the all-working will, the lively strength to act,
the song that beautifies all and renews itself from age to age. AMEN*

BENEDICTION

May your day be blessed
by moments of quietness,
light in your darkness,
strength in your weakness,
grace in your meekness,
joy in your gladness,
peace in your stillness.
May your day be blessed

DISMISSAL

May you go healed and refreshed for service
We go to love and serve God by serving others