

Epiphany 1 2010

Luke 3:15-17, 21-22 and Is. 43:1-7

“What Do You Expect?”

Read Lk 3:15

In the reading from Isaiah for today we hear the promise of God to be with us in the dangers of life. **“Fear not! You are mine. When you pass thru the waters I will be with you, and when you pass thru the rivers they will not sweep over you. When you walk thru the fire you will not be burned. For I am the Lord your God, your savior...you are precious in my sight....do not be afraid.”** Water and fire we understand as dangerous. Water can be frightening as can be fire. Water and fire don't mix. But the text tells us not to be afraid. This is good news! God is with us.

We all have hopes, dreams and expectations. We have hopes and dreams about life, about our future and about what we should get out of life. And in order to fulfill our hopes and dreams we have expectations for how life will treat us. We expect to live a long, full life. We expect to be safe, avoiding danger. We expect to be healthy. We expect to be treated fairly by others. Now anyone who older than 5 generally has come up against the harsh reality in life that we don't always get what we think we deserve and what we expect out of life. But that doesn't stop us from continuing to expect good things out of life. Our expectations for ourselves extend to those around us.

For example. As parents we have expectations for our children. What kind of person do you want your son or daughter to marry? You want your child to use good judgment in their choice of a mate, to choose someone who is considerate, smart, moral, kind, well motivated, level headed, mature, college educated on track to become a brain surgeon...and oh yes, someone who is handsome or beautiful and a Lutheran.

Expectations are part of life. They were also part of the life of the people of Israel. The prophet Isaiah said that the messiah to come would be great. The messiah would be God's servant who would be full of the spirit of God. The messiah would create justice, execute righteousness, and not fail. The messiah would not be discouraged, **“a bruised reed he would not break and a dimly burning wick he would not put out.”** (Is. 42:3) In other words, he would have great power and great compassion. A great leader.

That's a tall order for the messiah. Yet the prophesy said that this is what the messiah would, in fact, do! The messiah would bring good news to the people. That news would be like getting a pardon and release from prison.

The people listened to the prophets and waited. For hundreds of years they waited. Then along came John the Baptist. In his preaching he pointed to Jesus as the Messiah. He hyped up the expectations. **“The one who is coming is greater than I...in fact, I am not even worthy to untie his sandals. He will have a winnowing fork in his hand and he will clean house. The wheat he will gather into his granary and he will burn the chaff with unquenchable fire.”** (Luke 3:15-17).

Expectations were high when Jesus came. The gospel text says that the **“people were in great expectation”**. (Luke 3:15). They expected Jesus to do great things.

Jesus went to John at the Jordan River and was baptized. The crowds were gathered, it was a great moment. As Jesus was baptized the **“heavens opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him like a dove and a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved son, with you I am well pleased.”** (Luke 3:21-22). WOW! Expectations fulfilled! And the people flocked to Jesus. They came with their expectations. God is going to do a great new thing. There is going to be justice at last. The wicked will be punished (that means our enemies) and the righteous will be vindicated (that means us). The nations will come to us and give us honor for our great king.

And for a time it looked like Jesus would meet those expectations of the crowd. He went about doing good, healing those with diseases, preaching the good news, teaching of the Kingdom of God, and gathering disciples. Thousands flocked to hear him teach.

And then just when everything was looking good he messed up everything. He got into trouble with the authorities and was arrested, tried, convicted and killed, all in less than 24 hours. And the expectations collapsed. **“We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.”** (Luke 24:21).

Jesus went to the cross and died. And all we see is failure. All we see is shattered expectations, ruined hopes, shattered dreams. **“We had hoped that we was the one to redeem Israel”**. In the cross we see failure, death, the end of a promising life and we are disappointed. Even Jesus himself cried out on the cross, **“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”** (Mark 15:34).

But the story isn't over. There's more. In the cross God works the biggest miracle of all. The great reversal takes place. For the shadow of the cross falls across an empty tomb and out of failure comes a new beginning. Out of sorrow comes joy, out of defeat comes victory, and out of death comes life. God has done a new thing. Great is the victory of our God. And wonder of wonders, he gives us more than we expected or deserved. He gives this victory to us.

God doesn't wait for us to die before giving us this victory either. Oh, we must die, but we have that victory today as well. We have it in our baptism. God gives it to us as a gift.

St. Paul says it this way in Romans 6:3ff, "For surely you know that when we were baptized into union with Christ Jesus, we were baptized into union with his death. By our baptism, then, we were buried with him and shared his death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from death by the power of God, so too we might live a new life."

And so for 2000 years Christian parents have brought their children to God's house in faith, to be baptized. They come hoping to hear God's word of promise. And in these hopes God does not disappoint us. For in baptism God gives us what we hope for and a whole lot more, the forgiveness of sins, adoption into His family and the promise of salvation. In baptism God declares that we are his children.

Now there will come times for us when we will be tempted to think that God has abandoned us, forsaken us. We still have our worldly expectations of God and how we want him to work in our lives and in our world. We still have expectations for God to rescue us from all evil and land us safely on our feet in every crisis. And when the storms of life come and beat against our lives it is easy to be afraid and it is easy to cry out, God help me! Help my business, cure my illness, save my marriage, protect my children. Our expectations are great. And when there is no seeming reply, no rescue and no quick answer to our prayers, it is easy to lose faith and blame God. "You didn't help me when I needed it!"

It is then that you can look to your baptism and the action of God and the promises God made to you. Then you can remember God's word and

promise to you when he said, “you belong to me, forever, and nothing will snatch you out of my hand.”

This is the expectation of faith. It is expectation built not on smooth sailing and the quiet life. It is not expectation built on worldly success, power and glory. It is not expectation of a life free of heartache, sorrow and disappointment. But rather, it is expectation built on the faithfulness of God who in Christ Jesus forgives your sins and in baptism makes you, his child forever. Thanks be to God.

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, thank you for making us your children in baptism. Give us faith that trusts in your word and your promises. Protect us from vain hopes and proud dreams of worldly expectations. When troubles come our way, Lord, remind us by the work of your Spirit that we are yours, that we have been redeemed by Jesus and that we belong to you forever. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.