

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ!

Here we find John in prison. He has been preaching a baptism of repentance, not sparing his tongue when it comes to Pharisees and Sadducees and others, remember "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?" He has been baptizing and instructing those who come to him, "if you have two tunics, give one to someone who has none."

He has baptized Jesus, even though he thought that Jesus should have baptized him. He called Jesus the "Lamb of God" pointing out Jesus to some of his own disciples. He knew who Jesus was, he knew Jesus was the Messiah. But now he is wondering. He is wondering because as the last of the Old Testament prophets, not that he would have thought of himself that way, he has been expecting a Messiah who will come to judge sinners, to bring about some definite changes. But these things do not seem to be happening.

John is expecting a very different Messiah. Remember our gospel from last Sunday when John said the axe is lying at the root of the trees, trees without good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. John said the one coming after him was more powerful than him, that John wasn't worthy to carry his sandals, the one coming will baptize with Holy Spirit and with fire. John said of the coming one, his winnowing fork is in his hand and he will clear the threshing room floor, gather the wheat into his granary, but burn the chaff with unquenchable fire. John has understood his own role, to prepare the way, the voice of one crying in the wilderness. But Jesus, the Messiah, is not doing what John was expecting. It is not that John's faith is weak, but he expects imminent judgment from Jesus, but Jesus giving sight to the blind, cleansing lepers, raising the dead, preaching good news to the poor, isn't what he was expecting.

And for nearly everyone, that's the hard part of life, being patient with expectations, trying to have realistic expectations. Living with your own self-expectations, and living with people who aren't living up to your expectations.

How many of you remember the entirely forgettable 1980's movie called Labyrinth? (Well, if it's so forgettable, why do you remember it?) There was one line that I have remembered all these years, it goes like this: "I'm exhausted living up to your expectations." I have often wondered if Jesus was exhausted over the expectations that people had of him. Think of it like this.

When a woman is pregnant we say she is expecting. It's a good term. Expecting a baby will be born at some appointed time in the future, and along with the baby comes a whole wealth of other expectations. Who he or she will look like, what he or she will be like. Then there are expectations about the future, the kind of life he or she will live, the person he or she will become.

Consider that you are not born to just be yourself. Instead you are born with a mass

of other people's expectations for your life, and whether you like it or not, you have to work through it all.

John the Baptist has expectations that he has had since before he was born. An expectant Mary visits her kinswoman the expectant Elizabeth, and John leaps in his mother's womb when he senses Jesus. John knew then who Jesus was and I think he knew his own role as well. Now we find that Jesus is not living up to John's expectations.

And there's the rub! Even though Jesus himself tells us that wars and rumors of wars, poverty that will always be with us, we too are impatient and questioning because he is not living up to our expectations. We note the continuing increasing disparity between "haves" and "have-nots", new diseases including super bacteria and viruses and continuing resurgence of old diseases in new more virulent forms, more and more wars and rumors of wars, and now we come to the crux of the matter! We expect God to act, to come and come soon! Those are our expectations.

But God will do everything in his own good time. As for you and I, like John we are called to prepare the way for Jesus, working for justice and peace while living and speaking God's word. We are challenged to offer to church and world visions of renewal and transformation maybe without seeing the fruit of our efforts. We are challenged to remember that our church, Trinity Lutheran Church of Cook is a church that is part of God's mission, it is that which drives our missions. Frankly, we are challenged to live into God's expectations of his church, of his people, of his disciples, of you, and me. And suddenly we realize that we cannot live into God's expectations either.

But in this Advent season, and in every season of the church year, challenged though we may be, we are comforted. Because after all is said and done, we live by faith and die in hope, and we who have been saved by faith, a gift of God's grace, are privileged to be the least in the kingdom of God

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