

Great (and Smaller) Expectations

Intro. Most of us have expectations, hopes for our lives and our families. Some can be for enough food every day, a good job, a safe place to live. These are fair expectations. Some expectations seem unreal: peace in the world and in our families; justice for all people; kindness for and from people with whom share different values or customs. It can be frustrating when our expectations are not realized. John the Baptist was frustrated with his very different expectations of the Messiah.

I. Matthew tells us John was in jail, discouraged, wondering if his life was over and his work a failure. At least he had the blessing of good friends who visited him in prison. They told him about Jesus of Nazareth and the incredible things he was doing and saying. John hoped this was the Messiah he was

preparing for but was uncertain. John and Jesus grew up as cousins, knowing each other. They met each other when John baptized Jesus in the Jordan River. Why didn't John recognize the Jesus? He was confused because the Lord's message was not fire and vengeance, what he was expecting the Messiah to be. Instead, the Lord spoke of healing and forgiveness. As usual, the Lord did not respond to John's question: are you the one? He pointed, not to himself, but to the *signs* of the blind seeing, the crippled walking and the poor hearing the good news of salvation. The Lord left it up to John to answer his own questions. It didn't take John long to recognize the prophecies echoed in Isaiah that identified the works of the Messiah. John could rest, knowing his work was finished.

It wasn't that John didn't recognize his cousin's *face*. He didn't recognize his cousin's *message*. In his role as prophet preparing the way for the Messiah, much of John's focus was on repentance for sin. He preached destruction by ax and fire for those who refused to repent. The Lord, quoting Isaiah in contrast pointed to healing and mercy, an alternate way of salvation.

Concl. What do we expect from this season: gifts, toys, money, vacations? In moderation, good things. Maybe the best good thing would be the **un-**expected: family or friends we haven't seen or spoken to in a long time or a stranger who passes quickly through our lives and leaves us with a laugh or a smile when we needed it most. We can *tell* each other about the times we believe we have seen the Lord, but each of us has to recognize the

presence of the Lord for ourselves to be truly convinced. Like John, there are times we don't recognize the Lord in our daily lives. We are often expecting someone else. In this season we can hope in the Lord for salvation, mercy, healing, justice and peace. Are they unrealistic expectations? For us, yes. For him, no. **What and who are we expecting this Advent? Are we waiting for the Lord to “swoop down and restore everything?” We can do that, but it might be better, like Joseph and Mary, to say yes to the Lord's invitation to work with his grace and unleash his power within us to make these expectations become real.** [M.

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