

Expectation!
Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

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Our Gospel begins, “As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, John answered all of them by saying, “I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming;”

“As the people were filled with expectation ...” Imagine the scene for a moment? A crowd gathered in the dusty country way outside the city to hear a wild man preach and to be baptized in a muddy river. A people longing for something different, a new way, a savior.

When is the last time you were filled with expectation?

- Maybe at the birth of a child or grandchild?
- A graduation?
- The arrival of a friend whom you haven't seen in awhile?

Take some time to remember that feeling of expectation.

Now, when was the last time you were in a crowd of people filled with expectation?
That is a little harder.

- Perhaps a crowd waiting for a concert to begin or maybe a congregation anticipating an upcoming diaconal ordination for some of our beloveds.

After being home in Antigua, I can tell you the whole island is filled with expectation at the arrival of four Antiguan women who have been rowing their way across the Atlantic since Dec. 12 as part of a rowing race from Africa to Antigua. As of this morning according to my tracking app, they have 912 nm to go. The whole country has been following their updates, listening to their video messages and looking for the reports from the health officer. Everywhere I went in Antigua whether it was the waiter at a restaurant or a good friend, that was a topic everyone was excited to talk about. Now that's some expectation and I am sure when they come in, there will be a huge celebration.

Being filled with expectation is a wonderful thing and this is where the crowds are in this morning's gospel. They are hoping that John is the Messiah – the one who will restore the great nation of Israel and provide them with a new life.

But John tells them, that he is not the one. There is one more powerful than him who is coming who will baptize them with the Holy Spirit. Jesus shows up, and is baptized by John. The Holy Spirit descends on Jesus in the bodily form of a dove and a voice comes from heaven saying – You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.

The real challenge that for the people with all this expectation is that neither John nor Jesus was what they were wanting – a savior who would conquer the world for them. Instead they got a very different kind of Savior – one they were not expecting at all – one who hung out with the rejected and who healed the sick instead of ruling the world. A savior who died on a cross. What happens to those expectations then?

I suspect that what happened for the crowd was the same thing that happens to many of our expectations - they don't turn out quite the way we expected and we adjust. We have expectations in the things and events of this world, but often they are fulfilled only for a moment and sometimes not in the way we wanted. The only expectation we can truly rely on is that God will be with us always.

On my recent visit to Antigua, when I said goodbye to my mother the day I left, I paused to say goodbye to the other residents of the home that she is in and whom I have gotten to know. One lady grabbed my hand. She always blesses me when I see her, but this time she said make sure you turn to the Lord every morning in prayer. He will always sustain you. I told her – yes I know and thanked her. There was something poignant in her words, because I know the Lord sustains her even as she lives in this home where she is taken care of, but is not living the life she used to live. She relies on God. That is the expectation we can trust in – that God will always be with us.

We are reminded of this in our Old Testament reading from Isaiah. This was written for the Israelites in exile. Talk about being in need of expectation. I was especially struck by these verses,

**When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;
and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;
when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,
and the flame shall not consume you.
For I am the Lord your God,
the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.**

One of the commentators on today's readings said that the pastor who trained her, would use these words at the bedside of someone who was dying – both to sustain the person and the family gathered around. I thought how appropriate are they for all the times of our lives because they remind us of God's constant presence. How will our lives be if we come knowing that God will be with us when we pass through the water and the fire? When we know Jesus will be with us always? This is the true expectation that will get us through each and every day.

Perhaps when it comes for our expectations in this difficult world with the government shut down, where the TSA, custom officers and air traffic controllers, and so many other workers are not being paid, where those who depend on the presence of the government workers for their work are losing their livelihood, where many are hungry or without shelter, where others live in fear of violence and where our first responders find themselves in danger – in all these times and more, we can remember what God has

promised - the only expectation we can truly trust in – that God will show up for us always - no matter what is happening. That is the expectation we can depend on. This is what Jesus has promised in his baptism – the baptism he extends to all of us. As we trust in this expectation of God' presence with us always, I ask you to pray these words from our Old Testament reading Isaiah with me. Repeat after me line after line.

**When you pass through the waters,
I will be with you;
and through the rivers,
they shall not overwhelm you;
when you walk through fire
you shall not be burned,
and the flame shall not consume you.
For I am the Lord your God,
the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.**

Amen!!