

**Meditation:** “What are you expecting?”

Well, I’m not sure about the peace, but hope is building, and joy seems about ready to bust a seam. Less than 2 weeks to go until we celebrate the birth of the Messiah child – or if you prefer Greek over Hebrew, the Christ child. As we travel around the neighbourhood and watch the evening newscast we see that the houses, at least the outside of the houses, are decorated and strung with lights. We see a tree through the windows at almost every house, sometimes more than one tree. I imagine there is a growing accumulation of gifts under those trees.

Amongst those gifts there may be some things that we wish for.  
What are the things you are wishing for?

A new iPhone? A trip to somewhere warm?

Amongst the gifts there may be some things that we hope for.  
What are the things you are hoping for?

Seeing the entire family gathered around the table? Snow for Christmas day? Or maybe, if you are Ron and Shirley, the birth of a new great-grandchild?

Amongst the gifts there may be some things that we are expecting.  
What are the things you are expecting?

New socks and underwear?

It’s interesting.... the difference between expecting something, hoping for something, and wishing for something. A wish is something we have a strong desire for. A hope is something we think there is a distinct possibility might be or happen. An expectation is something we believe will be or will happen.

At the time of John the Baptist, the Jewish people, or at least the vast majority of them, wished for an end to Roman rule. They longed to have enough to feed, clothe, and house themselves, and make their tithes and offerings to the temple – something they could not do and pay their taxes to Rome, and the taxes were not optional.

In those days, the Jewish people, or at least those who gathered on the banks of the Jordan river, hoped that John was God's anointed – the Christ – the Messiah. They hoped that John was the one who would liberate them from their Roman overlords.

Yet the text says that the people were filled with expectation. What is it that they expected? What is it they believed? They believed that the Messiah would save them from the injustices of their time, and that the time was ripe for the arrival of the Messiah.

John told them that he was not the Messiah. He said that while the time was ripe, the Messiah was not coming today. What he did say is that the Messiah was coming, coming soon.

There are many in our world that have given up all hope. They have no hope of work, of housing, of a future. They lose themselves in an addiction of one type or another. What they long for is another shot of whatever it is that gets them from one day to the next. What they wish for is an end to the pain they feel. Expectations don't exist for them.... unless it is the expectation that nothing will change or get better and that they will die, likely sooner than later.

In order for there to be an expectation, there has to be an underpinning. There has to be a reason we believe that something will be or happen. There has to be trust.

John offered the people the good news of God's kingdom come – a time when all would be treated justly, when all would have sufficient to live and to thrive.

This vision did not originate with John. It is a vision that runs throughout what we know as the Old Testament. It is a vision that was shared by the prophets, by Micah (to seek justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God), by Isaiah (the lion will lie down with the lamb, and all...), and by others.

This vision is what the people trusted in. This vision was the basis of their expectation that the Messiah would soon be there to bring justice and righteousness, to bring to its fulfillment the reign of God.

I'll ask again.

What is it you wish for?

An end to the pandemic? A return to the ability to travel freely? The cessation of the extreme weather events, like this weekend's tornados in the US? The halting of climate change? Racial equity? Reconciliation with Canada's First Nations? No more inflation?

What is it you hope for?

That people would accept responsibility for their actions, and the consequences of their actions? That people would act in ways that are socially responsible? That people would respect one another and their differences?

What is it you expect?