

August 20, 2023

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost / Proper 15

**Meditation:** “A funny thing happened on the way to.....”

Does anyone remember the 1966 movie ‘A funny thing happened on the way to the forum’, starring Zero Mostel, Jack Gifford, Buster Keaton, and Phil Silvers? It was based on a play of the same name, about a Roman slave who tries to scheme his way to freedom by playing matchmaker to his master’s son. Along the way there are a lot of unexpected and hilarious twists and turns.

I don’t really know why I thought of this except that the other day when I was trying to come up with a title, everything was going sideways. I had most of the service worked out, and had started on the service for the 27<sup>th</sup>, and then moved on to prep a funeral service, and then I had my plan for the rest of the day and the phone rang. It was the funeral director. “Can you do a service for me on Saturday?” he asked. I already had my plans for the day worked out, and it was already almost noon on Thursday. My Thursday plans went out the window, and a whole new set of plans had to be made to have a funeral ready for Saturday morning. There was a family to meet with and a service to prepare and deliver. My mother always used to say, “there are only two sure things in life: death and taxes.” Not that I want to pick an argument with her, but I’d add a third thing, change. Just when I thought I had my plans all made along comes an unexpected phone call that changed everything I was planning for the next two and a half days.

Jesus was on his way to Tyre, or was it Sidon? Or does it even really matter? Anyway, Jesus was on his way somewhere and the unexpected happens. Someone asking for help wasn’t unexpected, but Jesus’ response is somewhat unexpected, at least for us in the

twenty-first century. His initial response is to ignore the woman. In his context, she was a woman, addressing a man. She was a non-Jew addressing a Jew. Ignoring would be perfectly expected in the situation. She keeps on petitioning him, like the story of the widow who pestered the judge daily for justice in her case, and Jesus does something else we would not really expect, he insults her, calls her a dog. Does this sound like the Jesus you have come to know in your faith journey?

But that still isn't the thing that is really unexpected. The really surprising thing that happens is that, after listening to the woman's argument, Jesus changes his mind. And it's not just that he grants her her plea and heals her daughter, but the focus of his entire mission is changed in the process. Jesus said that he was sent to the lost sheep of Israel. The woman argues that even though she is not of the house of Israel, she is a person, a child of God too. And in that moment Jesus' mission to the lost sheep of Israel becomes a mission to all of God's children, to all people everywhere. Jesus' mission grew in that moment.

The unexpected happens to us all, at some time or another. Perhaps it's because we live in Yellowknife or Kelowna, and a forest fire is threatening our city, and we have to change our plans and leave everything we know, perhaps for the last time. Perhaps it's because we have followed a call to serve others, and a crisis happens in someone's life and they need us, and all our plans go out the window and we change, make a new plan. Perhaps it's because our minister is leaving and we need to find our way forward as a congregation. Perhaps we are the Messiah, and we are on our way somewhere and someone challenges what we think our mission is – to the lost sheep of Israel – and we change our mission.

The unexpected happens, and it makes us change what we are doing, or how we think about things, or how we treat others, or expands our mission. The unexpected thing is not the triggering event, the unexpected thing is where we end up because of the change it causes.

Change happens, and as I said before, it is one of the certainties of life. God is about change – “I am about to do a new thing, do you not perceive it?” I’d like to add a fourth certainty of life, and that is that God is with us in the change and through the change and into the new reality. Thanks be to God.