

Sunday December 14, 2025
Third Sunday of Advent

MEDITATION “Great Expectations” *Rev. Mark Perry*

The time is near, in fact, for some, it has already started. The family gatherings. What do you expect this year? Will your brother Sam stay sober and polite this year for the first time ever? Will your ancient aunt Alice stop pinching your cheeks when she meets you like she has every year for the past 60 years? Will the family make it through Christmas dinner without at least one person having their feelings hurt and storming off? Will...? What is it you expect?

John is waiting. Waiting for; expecting the messiah.

John asks, “Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?”

John didn’t recognize Christ. Why? He recognized him in the womb, at his baptism. Why not now? And Jesus answers, “the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them.” This is the messiah that Isaiah prophesied about, “The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.” So why does John not recognize Jesus?

Many Christians think that church is about personal happiness, personal well-being (for followers of Joel Osteen – financial well-being), being with God when you die, being privately moral (usually that means sexually moral). These are the things they expect the church to preach on and teach. This is why they say things like the church ought to stay out of politics.... Because church is only about the individual.

Yet, the core message of the Bible is not what many people expect. The core message of the Bible is about public, political, and economic justice. Morality has to do with justice, not sex. The prophets talk about wages; about unjust scales; about the greed that skews the economy. Injustice will lead to destruction. (Bruggemann – pgs 12-13 of the Observer)

‘The story of Jesus is a story of reconciliation. God’s own presence was born into our fallible creation to reconcile us with a heavenly ideal of right relations, grace and abundance. Jesus enters our mortal and self-centered existence to demonstrate the power of selfless love and guide us to grander purpose, to reconnect us to God’s intention for the world.’ (Marui – pg 1 of the Bridge – 26a of the Observer)

So why doesn’t John recognize Jesus? Because this isn’t the messiah he has been expecting. This isn’t the messiah he has been preaching about. Jesus is not John Wayne, come to judge the wicked and administer some justice with his six shooter. Jesus is not casting the wicked into the lake of eternal fire. Jesus is not overthrowing the powerful.

The reading from the book of the prophet Isaiah is written at a time when things were rotten for the Israelites. They were being held in bondage in Babylon. God’s earthly home, the temple in Jerusalem, had been torn down. Their God, the God of the land of Israel, was far away from them and their God was homeless. They yearned for the way things were to be turned upside down. Indeed, Isaiah prophesies of a time when things will be turned upside down:

A highway shall be there,
and it shall be called the Holy Way;
it shall be for God’s people;
no traveler, not even fools, shall go astray.
No lion shall be there,
nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it;
they shall not be found there,
but the redeemed shall walk there.
And the ransomed of the Lord shall return
and come to Zion with singing;
everlasting joy shall be upon their heads;
they shall obtain joy and gladness,
and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

God's people, captive in Babylon, will be captives no more. They shall return to the land of their ancestors; the land promised to them by God.

Mary sings, not only of a time, but of a Messiah who turns everything upside down:

He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.

He has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty.

He has come to the aid of his child Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

The Messiah that John is expecting is not the Messiah of which Mary sang.

The Messiah that comes is the one who turns reality upside down:

waters shall break forth in the wilderness

and streams in the desert;

the burning sand shall become a pool

and the thirsty ground springs of water;

the haunt of jackals shall become a swamp;

the grass shall become reeds and rushes.

The Messiah that comes is the one who obliterates the ways of the world: he tends to the needs of the lowly and the outcasts: the lepers, the prostitutes, the crippled, the blind, the deaf, the hungry, the beggars, the homeless, the unemployed, the marginalized, the oppressed, the broken, the grieving, the fearful, the humiliated, the ones who are yearning and searching for justice and righteousness and hope.

The Messiah that comes is the one who upsets our expectations, who turns our expectations upside down, perhaps most especially our expectations of who and what the Messiah is.

Things are not right or fair or just in our world today. War is being waged on us on battlefields, economically, and on social media. We all have our struggles with disease and aging and family dynamics and perhaps even of being scammed out of our hard-earned money. We too are waiting. Waiting for the messiah to come and turn everything upside down; to restore fairness and justice in our world; to heal our diseases, our griefs and our anxieties.

But, and here's the question, do we recognize Jesus when he comes to us? And just who is it we expect Jesus to be? Do we want a cute baby that will make us feel warm and cuddly inside? Do we want someone who will make us feel good about ourselves so we can go on living our lives as we always have lived them? Do we want someone who won't make any claims on us, or try to change us or change the way we live?

Are we truly prepared for Jesus who comes to turn our world and our lives upside down? Are we prepared to change our lives? Are we prepared for the cost of discipleship; for the cost of following in Jesus' footsteps? Are we ready to put Jesus on, like that new cashmere sweater we coveted and got, or will we treat Jesus like that gaudy tie that we slipped into the back of the closet and forget about?

Do we recognize Jesus when he comes to us, bearing a casserole and some companionship when our hearts are heavy? Do we recognize Jesus when he comes to us, knocking at the door asking for a meal and some human warmth? Do we recognize Jesus when he comes to us in the laughter of a child? Or are we waiting for, expecting someone else?

The irony is that while we keep waiting for someone else, for the one we expect to come, Jesus is waiting. Jesus is waiting for us. Jesus is waiting for us to recognize him. Jesus is waiting for us to follow him.