

Sixth Sunday after Epiphany

February 12, 2017

Haven Lutheran Church

Readings: Psalm 146: 5-10; Luke 7:18-35

“What Are We Waiting For?”

“The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.”

“Lord, help us hear your Word and see your glory. Amen

“What do you do when Jesus turns out to be someone other than whom you thought he was or hoped he would be?”¹ Like John the Baptist, you might ask, “Lord, are you the one I’ve been waiting for, or shall I wait for another?”

A kindergarten teacher was observing her classroom of children while they drew. She would occasionally walk around to see each child's artwork. As she came to one little girl who was working diligently, she asked what the drawing was.

The girl replied, "I'm drawing God."

The teacher paused and said, "But no one knows what God looks like."

Without missing a beat, the girl replied, “They will in a minute.”²

John the Baptist had an idea of how God would be and work here on earth. He announced God was sending the long-awaited Messiah and would bring judgement and justice. John had told his fellow Hebrews to repent. He spoke of God already holding an axe lying at the roots, ready to cut down and burn fruitless, unworthy trees. He spoke of the Messiah coming with a winnowing fork, to gather the wheat and burn the worthless chaff. “And there Jesus was ---- hanging out [and eating with] the very people who were supposed to be chopped and burned”: tax collectors, prostitutes, Samaritans, outcasts. “This wasn’t in the script at all . . . And because of that John sends his disciples to ask Jesus, “Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?”³ “Typically, each of us shares in John’s experience. We think we know who Jesus is, what he is doing, and what he stands for, and then” our experience challenges us to revise our own understandings⁴ of God.”

John was looking for a Messiah to clean up the mess of sin and sinners. Other Hebrews understood Scriptures to say that the expected Messiah would be a charismatic

king or military leader who would restore Israel as God's special kingdom, to which all other peoples and rulers would bow in submission. And what of us? Pastor Porter Taylor put it this way:

“Each of us has expectations about the kind of Messiah we want: Some of us want a first-century Jonathan Edwards - breathing fire and brimstone, scaring the heaven into people. Or maybe an ideological Jesus who will champion our favorite cause, who will assure us that God is for gun control or against abortion? Or maybe a Good Shepherd Jesus who will not demand anything of us, but will assure us that He loves us.”⁵

Some expect God to solve our problems, save us from our self-made disasters, prevent sickness or death, protect those we love from difficulty, and bring peace and prosperity without upsetting, offending, challenging or changing anyone, especially ourselves.

“Sooner or later our ideas about Jesus do not conform” with what we see our Lord doing in the Scriptures or what we perceive God doing or not doing in the world. “And we too ask: Are you the one to come or are we to wait for another?”⁶

The disciples of John come from where John is being held in prison to ask that question to Jesus. I love that Jesus does not scold or shame John or the disciples for asking. Instead, Jesus has compassion for the surprise, tensions and maybe even doubt that John is feeling, that we feel when God does not act as we wish. Jesus answers:

“Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, poor have good news brought to them.”

The Hebrews would recognize this description of God's special anointed one from the prophet Isaiah. Jesus seems to be saying, "What do you see happening? What do you see God doing?" God is acting in human experience "through Jesus and through Jesus we see God's commitment to the afflicted, the oppressed, and the impoverished." Through Jesus we see that God has chosen to show God cares about human suffering."⁷ Jesus doesn't whip up a showy miracle to win John's approval or gain popularity. In fact, Jesus does not use a single "I" statement in his description. He does not take the credit for all that is happening. Instead, he points them and us to see what God is doing right before their eyes, "Taste and see that the Lord is good."

Knowing we will be challenged by the ways God chooses to act and engage in the world, Jesus adds — "Blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me." (Luke 7:23) In other words, "Blessed are those who do not reject Jesus, even though he turns out to be someone different from what they had expected, imagined, or hoped he would be."⁸

Jesus upsets our expectations. Our Lord will not stay in the box or the lines of our design. Then we must face a dilemma: Do we want to "follow the living Christ or simply our idea of who the Christ should be?"⁹ That pushes us straight out of our comfort zone or into a wilderness, where we will eventually find new understandings of our Lord or we will walk away from God in search of someone or something else. **Jesus** prays for us, "Blessed are you who don't take offense at me," you who wipe your preconceived notions about me out your eyes and look again in Scripture, in your life, in the world around you.

In a devotional blog, a woman wrote about when her first son was four years old. She found herself angry and frustrated with him a lot. One day she just “happened” to see a book on the inspirational display at the grocery store, entitled, *Overcoming Hurts and Anger*. She said she doesn’t remember anything else from that book but one piece of very wise counsel ---- Adjust your unrealistic expectations. She realized that although her son was four, and a smart, exceptional four at that, it was still not fair to expect him to be and do things appropriate for a twelve-year-old. She said it was amazing how much happier she was when she decided to adjust her thinking and expect him to act like a four-year-old¹⁰ boy. I wonder if it might be similar for us.

“What do you do when Jesus turns out to be someone other than who you thought he was or hoped he would be?”¹¹

When we find ourselves disappointed in God, it’s not God who has failed but our expectations of God have failed us. As much as God wants to be known, tries to be present and revealed, much of God and how God chooses to act remains a mystery. Which doesn’t sit well with our modern, scientific notions that all things can and will be explained. Within the limitations of our humanness, we can draw every so close to our Lord but we will never fully comprehend the Divine. That is unsettling for us who prefer things to be clear, explainable and under our control. It’s the tension of faith — to believe with all our heart, mind, and soul in Father-Son-Holy Spirit who loves us passionately, eternally and perfectly even when we find ourselves wrestling with the unanswered expectations of our prayers and hopes. Take heart and remember, “Jesus came in humility

for the humble. He came for those who did not have it all worked out for themselves. He came for those who knew they needed him”¹² even though they would not always understand. I find that wildly reassuring. While I cannot fully comprehend God and God’s ways, I CAN trust that God is pure goodness and love itself. Jesus says, “Blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me.” As he did to those disciples of John, Jesus tells us to look and listen beyond our disappointment and fears. “Every now and then, in surprising places, [you can see] marvelous things are happening. People who were blind to the love loose in the world have received their sight; people who were paralyzed with fear are limber with hope; people who were deaf from want of good news are singing hymns. And best and most miraculous of all, [Jesus might say to John’s disciple] tell John that this is not the work of one lonely Messiah but the work of God, carried out by all who believe, and there is no end in sight . . . [It] is bigger than any of us.”¹³ “If one says Jesus is the Messiah [the one who is to come], then one is saying that in the ministry of Jesus we are seeing what God is doing in the world, what the reign of God really is. And that, of course, is to say what we are to be doing in the world if we confess that Jesus is God’s Messiah.”¹⁴ “There’s no need to wait. Don’t go looking for something to replace God. Following our Lord who is different from what we imagined is always demanding; but this is the way to the kingdom of God.”¹⁵ Do not take offense. Follow Jesus. It’s not always easy or what we expected. Yet, holding on to faith and God we say, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Alleluia.

Linda M Alessandri 2/11/17

ENDNOTES

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1. R. Alan Culpepper, "The Gospel of Luke," New Interpreter's Bible: Volume IX Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995 p. 161
 2. Unknown, posted on <http://jokes.christiansunite.com/>
 3. The Rt. Rev. Porter Taylor, "The Place He Stops is Now," December 12, 2004 as posted on <http://day1.org>
 4. R. Alan Culpepper, "The Gospel of Luke," New Interpreter's Bible: Volume IX Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995 p. 161-162
 5. The Rt. Rev. Porter Taylor, "The Place He Stops is Now," December 12, 2004 as posted on <http://day1.org>
 6. Adapted from quote and thoughts of The Rt. Rev. Porter Taylor, "The Place He Stops is Now," December 12, 2004 as posted on <http://day1.org>
 7. R. Alan Culpepper, "The Gospel of Luke," New Interpreter's Bible: Volume IX Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995 p. 162
 8. R. Alan Culpepper, "The Gospel of Luke," New Interpreter's Bible: Volume IX Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995 p. 161
 9. The Rt. Rev. Porter Taylor, "The Place He Stops is Now," December 12, 2004 as posted on <http://day1.org>
 10. Sue Bohlin "**Unrealistic Expectations**" 10/11/2010 as posted on http://blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/unrealistic_expectations
 11. R. Alan Culpepper, "The Gospel of Luke," New Interpreter's Bible: Volume IX Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995 p. 161
 12. The Very Rev. Samuel G. Candler "Are You the One Who Is to Come?"
December 16, 2007 as posted on <http://day1.org>
 13. Barbara Brown Taylor, "Are You the One?" Mixed Blessings Cambridge: Cowley Publications, 1998 p. 92
 14. Fred B. Craddock, Luke Louisville: John Knox Press, 1990 p.101
 15. Tom Wright, Luke for Everyone Louisville KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004 p. 88.