**What To Expect When You’re Expecting Christ**

Based on [Matthew 11:2-11](https://biblia.com/books/esv/Mt11.2-11)

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Third Sunday in Advent ~ *Gaudete*

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Today's gospel is about our expectations of God. Jesus was not who people expected him to be. Neither was John the Baptist. One is the Son of God, the other a prophet of God, and both were disappointments to people. So too, the church growth movement is exemplary of how christians can have misplaced expectations about the messiah. I remember at my last parish, a council member gave me a first-day tour of the church. He took me up to the balcony and showed me how much seating there was in their vast new building. He looked at me and said, with confidence, “You’re going to fill all these seats.” The man had just met me...where did that expectation come from? In the end, he was disappointed.

There is only two legitimate places where you should form your expectations of people, their words and their works. John the Baptist sent his disciples to ask Jesus whether he was the messiah or not. John was in prison, and we can assume this went against his expectations. John expected Jesus to liberate the captives, not himself become one. John is despairing in prison; his hope is faltering...and so he needs to hear the words of Jesus.

Someone once said to my wife, “Why do you go to church every week. Haven’t you learned it all by now?” The reason you go to church every week is to hear the word of God. Luther once said, “**We need to hear the gospel often, because we forget it often.”** To put it another way, God’s word is like food, we always need to eat again. Jesus said, “I am the bread of life”.

John the Baptist was a great prophet, but he was also a sinner like us, with doubts like us, with anxieties like us. And sitting alone in a cell, with only his own disciples there to comfort him, needed a word from Jesus to give him assurance of things hoped for, and conviction in things not seen. Just as you, in your life's troubles and on your deathbed, you have heard the gospel before, but you aren’t simply meant to self-medicate God’s word, and self-minister. God prepared a ministry to ensure that you are preached to in time of distress.

So it is with John the Baptist. He sends his disciples to bring him Jesus words. He wants to hear from Jesus. He’s in prison, probably has doubts, faith needs to be fed. He doesn’t want to sit around in his cell and self-medicate the gospel. He wants to hear it. It’s like the joke about the wife who says “You never tell me you love me”; and the husband says “I told you when we were married...I’ll let you know if I change my mind.” No, it’s not good enough to hear that Jesus loves you at baptism, and to not go to church again. Not even John’s faith, John who is the greatest of the prophets, not even John’s faith is strong enough to survive without regularly hearing the gospel preached to him. And Jesus knows this. So, just as he would send out the apostles to proclaim his resurrection, so too, he sent John’s disciples back to him with the gospel to preach.

One reason we need to hear the gospel regularly preached to us, rather than just trust that we know it already is so that the word remains fresh in us. The gospel is true, but after a while, our sin can distort the word...to where we believe God promised things he didn’t and that he didn’t promise what he did. This may have been John’s doubts. He may have thought that messiah promised to come and liberate the captives, but that’s not exactly what the prophecy said. The prophet Isaiah speaks the words of the messiah in chapter 61, saying “**The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound**”. Notice here, the messianic words do not say that the lord has annointed him to “feed the poor, liberate the captives, and open the prison of those who are bound.” The messiah will come to ***proclaim*** these things. Of course the captives will be liberated, and they will be liberated by the messiah. But he must first come to proclaim it. And in that proclamation itself, there is healing and life and reconciliation with God and the courage to face death without fear.

As Christmas approaches, it is good for us to remember what to expect from our Lord. We are to expect peace and favour from God, who is pleased with us on account of his Son. He came, not dressed in soft clothing but wrapped in swaddling cloths and laid in a manger. He came, not in kings houses but in a stable with farm animals. He came, not to give you an easy life, but a good death. He came not to save you from persecution and the troubles of life, but to preach to you the gospel in the midst of it. He came to preach to you, suffer and die for you, and rise again ahead of you. And he will come again in glory to carry out everything that he proclaimed. He will come again to judge the living and the dead, and reward faith wherever he finds it. He will heal all diseases and handicaps, he will liberate the captives and open prisons. He will give to the poor the kingdom of heaven. He will wipe every tear from every eye, and what has been proclaimed to your ears will be accomplished before your eyes.

Until then, we believe the messiah has come. We believe that jesus christ came to our world, died for our sins, rose for our redemption, and we who believe it receive the forgiveness of sins and peace with God. And that peace which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus until he comes again to deliver the kingdom of God to us in glory.