

Why did you come to worship this morning? Is it because it's Sunday and that's what you always do on Sunday? Are you here because it's one hour of peace from the storm, a break from the hectic pace of the week? Are you sitting in those admittedly less-than-comfortable pews because your spouse or parent made you come? Maybe it's because we have a pretty darn good coffee hour, and being among familiar, accepting faces enlivens your soul. Perhaps you aren't even sure why you're here, you're just here. I suspect we're all here for many reasons that change from week to week. Don't worry: I am not going to tell you that you're wrong or right, but I want each of us to consider what drives us to gather and sing the words we sing, to submit to the prayers we pray, and to listen to the words that are spoken. Because why we do things often shapes our expectations of what we think should or will happen. I think that we often sell God and ourselves short when it comes to what God can do to us and through us. It's just the same 'ole, same 'ole.

Certainly we come to hear Scripture, but do we expect to hear a Word from God that speaks to our lives today? Or do we imagine that we'll just hear interesting information about people in the past?

We count on singing hymns, but do we expect that we might come across a few words that will reveal the depth of God's love and purpose for us in a new way? While we hope to enjoy good snacks at coffee hour and catch up with familiar faces, do we imagine that we'll have a meaningful conversation with someone whom we've only known in passing? Has our ability to choose churches based on our liturgical or theological inclinations caused us to lose sight of the sheer privilege and responsibility that comes with being a follower of Jesus Christ? Have we let the culture in which we live shape our perception of God's kingdom rather than letting God's kingdom shape our perception and role in the world?

Were they sitting in the pews with us today, the Israelites might tell us how easy and dangerous it is when God's dream gets co-opted by our own desires and myopic ideas. After years of exile and captivity, God's people had yearned for some stability and peace of mind, and they turned to worship to do so. Their thinking went like this: make worship sublime, prayers beautiful and poetic, and sacrifices noticeable and grand. In return, God will grant us the desires of our hearts. *Quid pro quo*. But while they had the formula down they had missed the point of worship completely.

Sure, worship was to draw them closer to God, but it wasn't simply so that they could feel God and check off a weekly duty. The essence was to be transformed more and more into God's image. It wasn't about doing a few good deeds and patting themselves on the back.

God says to them through the prophet Isaiah: "Hey. You put on this great show of fasting and sacrifice, but while you're doing that people are suffering; your neighbors and employees are falling through the cracks of the system. But you've decided that since your life is good, they're the ones with the problem. That's not the fast and transformation of me," God says.

"Is not this the fast I choose? To loose the bonds of injustice; to let the oppressed go free, to break the yoke of those in bondage to the powers of corruption, oppression and economic exploitation. The fast I choose is to share bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your home. Is not the fast that I choose the one that does not allow you to turn from your neighbor and pretend that they are somebody else's problem to deal with? Is not the sacrifice I call for the one where you create a world of justice—where there is no "us" and "them," only "us?" The Israelites had let the patterns of society shape their worship and faith.

Friends, it's not a fun question to ask, but we must ask it: What have we made of our worship and faith? Do we tell us ourselves that its primary purpose is to uplift us, not cause us to confront the gods of compromise and concession we've created so that we can assure ourselves Jesus was from a long time ago and didn't really expect us to hate mother and father? He didn't really mean for us to question our possessions and our drive to have a cushy 401K. "That's not being selfish, that's being responsible!" we say. Or, maybe that's just me. Maybe I'm the only one worried that I should be saving more for retirement. Maybe I'm the only one who wrestles with the demands of the Gospel and the ease of self-satisfaction. Either way, Jesus said that "we are the salt of the world." Salt does not exist in and of itself. Its whole reason for being is to enhance the existence of something else.

What are we willing to face about ourselves in order to live into God's dream and expand our imagination to live boldly and confidently in the power and purpose of the Gospel of Jesus Christ? In other words, do you want to live into your truest purpose?

I want to tell you a story that some of you may already know. It took place in 1962, at a time when the realities of racial and economic division—much like they are now—were coming to a head. St. Paul's, like a handful of churches that were not racially monolithic, had two Sunday schools—one for white children, one for black children.

Although *Brown v. Board* had been passed years earlier, the law was not imposed upon private institutions. One young mother of four decided enough was enough. This woman is small woman, but she has magnanimous heart and speaks her mind. She was to teach Sunday school that fall, but she knew that despite the Southern culture of niceness and decorum, the separation and hidden message that all people were not of the same merit and worth was not the Gospel nor was it how she was raised. One morning, Lois Keech marched into the rector's office one day and speaking about one African American family, said, "Those Pinkney children belong in Sunday School unless I'm not teaching it any more." Lois was not rude, but she was "salty." And as she told me, she'd do it again in a heartbeat. She was one among many who came to church that day who would come in the years ahead who did not come expecting to maintain the status quo even when it ruffled feathers.¹

What expectations did you bring with you today? I am not calling us to consider why we're here because we've gotten it all wrong. I want you to remember that God's Spirit is with you. You have everything you need to be salt and light. I want us to have great expectations, because God has great expectations for us. I want us to live into the kingdom of heaven because until we do, this kingdom will be a dream or metaphor and not a reality. Let us not get sucked into the vortex of being a Democrat or Republican, progressive or conservative, lest we remain more concerned with validating our political beliefs than living out the Gospel that calls us to challenge the systems of injustice or lead people to question if they are made in God's image.

Beloveds, when we live into God's great expectations, it's not simply nice people that the world will know when they meet us, it'll be Jesus.

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