

December 18, 2016

Anticipation, Expectation, Reality

PRAYER

May the words of my mouth be mediations of our hearts, be always acceptable unto thee. O Lord, our strength, and our redeemer. AMEN

SERMON

Well we now have made it to the fourth Sunday of Advent. All our candles on the advent wreath are lit. We are now preparing for the last few days before the celebration of the birth of Christ. And it's always on the fourth Sunday of advent that we hear about a figure that is very important to the gospel but we know very little about. We hear very little about and that would be Joseph. Now Mary has had the opportunity to meet with the angel. To hear that she is the chosen one to bear the son of God. She accepts that responsibility. But the one to whom she has betrothed, engaged doesn't get that same heads up. We have a man who is planning to marry Mary. And all of a sudden finds that she is pregnant.

Now I read this every year, I preach on it almost every year. But as I was thinking about Joseph and us, I started to think that there are two words that really seem to direct Joseph and the living of his life up to this point. One is anticipation and the other is expectation. Now the anticipation is about knowing what's coming next, what's coming up. We anticipate things that are going to go on in our lives or go on in the world. Joseph was, I believe, anticipating a normal life. So far that's exactly what he's had. He has grown up, learned to be a carpenter from his father. That was the way things were done, you followed in your father's footsteps. So, he became a carpenter like his father was a carpenter in the city of Nazareth. He anticipated marrying because that's what good Jewish boys and men did as they grew older. You married, you had a family, you lived happily ever after. That's what is anticipated. And everything has been moving along just fine. He's a carpenter, he seems to be making a good life for himself. He is able to take a wife. He is going to marry Mary and then the expectation comes in. The expectation is everything is going to continue to proceed just beautifully. They will get married then they will have a family. If he has sons, he will teach his son to be a carpenter. Everything is going just fine until Mary is found to be pregnant.

Now what we learn about Joseph is that he was a very honorable man. He was a faithful man and he did not want to disgrace Mary publicly. But he also knew that this was not the way things were supposed to be going. This was not the expectation of what had been anticipated. And so, he chooses in his own heart and his mind as he directs his life to put her aside quietly. He doesn't want to disgrace her publicly but yet he doesn't feel like he can continue his engagement and marry her since the child she's carry's is not his. Anticipation and expectation. But his decision was sidelined because he was a faithful person and because God spoke to him in a dream. Don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife. The child she bears is conceived by the Holy Spirit. This is part of God's plan. And Joseph although we hear very little about him is also part of God's plan. And he is invited to participate, he is invited to play father to the son of God. To raise him as if he were his own, to teach him all that he himself knows, carpentry and faithfulness. And he wakes from the dream and his life is changed yet again. And now there is a whole new set of things to anticipate and new things for his expectations.

I hope that you can relate to that especially as we are closing in on Christmas day. If you are like me or like most people I know, there is anticipation. Christmas is coming. I always like it invariably as I'm going through the line at the cash register at Publix because that's where I do my shopping. The cashier, and it seems like I go every day recently. And invariably the person will say, "Well are you ready for Christmas?" Have you heard that? And my response is, "do I have a choice?" And especially when I'm wearing my collar that's particularly poignant.

It's coming and we are anticipating it. And most people are anticipating getting together with family whether they are coming here or whether you are going there. You're anticipating the gifts that you've gotten, will they like them? You know hopefully they will. Or this is just right. And you have probably in your mind and you've seen it in movies and everything else, the anticipation of the perfect Christmas day. Christmas morning, family is together. Everybody loves one another. You see where I'm going with this right. Anticipation, expectation, reality. We have these expectations even though we know that they're probably not deeply set in reality. It's what we want to have happen, it's our anticipation of what should happen. Our expectation of what we would like to have happen. And then reality steps right into our life and says things are going to be different.

Now we can like Joseph make up our minds on our own how we are going to deal with this. We can choose to put the family aside silently, not publicly disgrace them. Or we can listen to God about how we are to embrace the people around us. Whether it be family, whether it be friends, whether it be neighbors who are not friends. Whatever the reality is we can either choose to follow our own idea about how to do it or we can listen to God. Now as the church, we claim that we listen to God. That how I live my life and how I respond to people and how I react is based not completely on me and my feelings and my understanding. Even my anger. But we have the call to listen to God. We have the call to set aside our anticipation and our expectation and let God speak to our reality. Where do we go from here as a follower of Jesus Christ? Now that we have received Joseph's stepson as the Messiah, as the Christ. As we have chosen to follow him as Lord and Savior. Now we are called to live our lives certainly with our understanding of the best way to go through life with the hopes and aspirations that we have as we anticipate moving through our lives. That we put our expectations and our hopes out there. But to allow God to address our reality as we live through life. Now some people come to the church, come to the following of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior with the idea, the expectation that this is going to change my life whether I want it changed or not. That God ought to be able to direct me into paths that are safe and well-being is part of my living. Where the traumas of life are elsewhere. That I am in some kind of a bubble that God protects me from the bad things that are going on in the world. And I certainly have known people who came to the church, came to God, came to Jesus Christ with that anticipation and with that expectation. And invariably they are disappointed. Thus, as Joseph was disappointed that what he anticipated and his expectation of his family had changed dramatically.

Like Joseph we are called to listen to God to move us through that. To recognize that God does not keep life from happening to us. God walks with us through that life. That we are given the tools, the strength, the courage that is not naturally ours and able to deal with life as we find it. Because not only are we dealing with the consequences of our decisions as we walk through life. We are also dealing with the consequences of others. The decisions that they make and how they affect people around them. And sometimes they are our friends and sometimes they are our neighbors and sometimes they are our family. And we are called to listen for the voice of God as we are making those decisions about how to proceed. Whether it be forgiveness, whether it be asking for forgiveness, whether it be loving even our

enemies. We are to listen to the voice of God that leads us to the place that we need to be. Just as Joseph needed to be led. He needed a voice outside of himself to share what God was doing that gave him a different perspective of what was going on in his life. And we need to listen for that voice, we need listen to that voice as we invite God to share with us what's the next step. How do I deal with this? Because life has not met my expectations, how do I reorient. So, that it is not me but God leading me. So, that I might deal with the things that are going on in my life. Or that I might affect the things that are going on in the lives of the people around me. We all have anticipation of what's coming in our lives. Some things we know for sure, some things we hope for. We will invariably create expectations about how it should go and how it should look and how it should feel. When you run into those realities that are different from those expectations. Before you make that final decision about what to do, where to go. Listen for the voice of God. Listen to where God is leading you. Because in following the voice of God, Jesus was given an earthly father that led to him to a life, an adulthood that allowed him to become the Savior of the world.