

## Opening

- As we go through life, all of us develop certain expectations.
- Some of these are pretty basic to our very existence.
  - If we are careful about what we eat and how much we eat, and if we get enough exercise and have regular medical checkups, we expect to stay reasonably healthy.
  - If we go to school, pay attention, and do the assignments, we expect to learn.
  - When we work, we expect to be paid a fair return for our labor.
  - When we buy something, we expect to get something equal in value to the price we paid.
  - We expect leadership, responsiveness, and accountability from our government, protection from our police and our military, and fairness and justice from our legal system.
- **We all have expectations of each other, too.**
  - If we love someone, we expect—or at least we hope—to be loved in return.
  - In all of our relationships we expect to give and take and to share and share alike.
  - As parents, we expect our children to make good grades, be responsible for household chores, choose good friends, and go to church regularly.
    - In return, our children expect us, as parents, to support them emotionally and financially, to provide for their education, and to just be there for them when they need us.
- **For most of us, our list of expectations includes expectations for the church, as well.**
  - We expect the church to be a place where we can go for worship on Sunday.
    - A place where we can learn more about God and Jesus through Sunday School and Bible Study.
    - A place where we can be in fellowship with old friends and occasionally, meet new ones.

- A place for weddings, funerals, baptisms, confirmations, Communion and other activities.
  - We especially expect the church to be a place where we and others can turn to when we need comfort or help.
    - A place that will always be there when we need it.
    - And as church members, we expect each other to support the church's ministry with time, talents, and money.
- **And most of us have expectations when it comes to pastors, too.**
  - There is a funny illustration, which highlights the expectations that SOME church folks seem to have for their pastors.
    - It goes like this:
  - The perfect pastor has been found:
  - He preaches exactly fifteen minutes and then sits down. He condemns sin, but never steps on anybody's toes. He works from 8 in the morning to 10 at night, doing everything from preaching sermons to sweeping.
    - He makes \$60 per week, gives \$30 a week to the church, drives a late model car, buys lots of books, wears fine clothes, and has a nice family. He always stands ready to contribute to every other good cause, too, and to help panhandlers who drop by the church on their way to somewhere.
    - He is 36 years old, but preaches like he's been preaching for 40 years. He is tall on the short side, heavysset in a thin sort of way, and handsome. He has eyes of blue or brown (to fit the occasion), and wears his hair parted in the middle, left side dark and straight, right side brown and wavy. He has a burning desire to work with the youth, and spends all his time with the senior citizens. He smiles all the time while keeping a straight face, because he has a keen sense of humor that finds him seriously dedicated. He makes fifteen calls a day on church members, spends all his time evangelizing non-members, and is always found in his study if he is needed.
    - Unfortunately, he burnt himself out and died at the age of 32. (Michael Hodgin, ed., 1001 Humorous Illustrations for Public Speaking [Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994], p. 253)
- **Sometimes our expectations are realistic; sometimes they're not.**
- John the Baptizer had been traveling throughout the region, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, and today's text tells us that the people were filled with expectations.

- But John saw that for many, their expectations were unrealistic, because they were wondering aloud if John might be the Christ, the anointed Messiah of God.
- So, John resets their expectations saying, “I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming
  - I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire” (v. 16).
- **John himself had his own expectations of the Christ.**
  - John expected Christ to be a powerful person—one who would use his power to transform the lives of people from within, by baptizing them with his spirit—with God’s Spirit.
  - John described the transforming quality of this power by saying, “His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire” (v. 17).
  - For John, this “Baptism with Spirit and Fire,” will have an ongoing quality.
    - It will continue to define people’s lives and ministries.
    - It will define their present AND their future.
  - The power of **THIS** baptism is eternal and it will never be quenched.

### **Baptism of the Lord Sunday**

- Today is “Baptism of the Lord Sunday.”
- It is a time when we remember and celebrate our own baptisms.
  - And it’s a great time to ask ourselves, “What do we **expect** from our baptisms?”
  - In this account found in Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus comes to John to be baptized, saying, “...it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness” (v. 3:15).
  - Today’s text from Luke’s Gospel tells us that after Jesus had been baptized, God lays claim to Jesus, saying “and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.’”
- In our own baptisms, we too take that “first step” toward fulfilling all righteousness.
  - And as it was for Jesus, our baptism is a sign that God has claimed our lives and that we have acknowledged that claim.

- And our place as children of God is “sealed” when, as part of our sacrament of baptism, the power of the Holy Spirit is invoked with the laying on of hands, as the pastor calls the person being baptized by name and says:
  - “...child of the covenant, you have been sealed by the Holy Spirit in baptism, and marked as Christ’s own forever. The Holy Spirit work within you, that having been born through water and the Spirit, you may live as a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ.”
- It is this invocation that we especially need to remember today.
  - For it is, as we live out our baptism, that we grow in faith—Grow in our confirmation of Jesus Christ as our Savior.
    - We let him deliver us from slavery to sin and death.
  - Do we expect our baptism to influence our entire faith journey in this way?
    - As it was for those who were with John, does our baptism still give us the feeling of renewal?
    - Each day, are we ready for new start on life—ready for the Messiah to come?
    - Or was our baptism simply an act—a religious ritual, having no ongoing influence in our lives?

## **A Call to Vocation**

- You see, our baptism is a call to vocation.
  - The word “vocation” itself means a call or summons.
    - Having a vocation means MORE than having a job.
      - It means doing what one is meant to do.
  - Jesus was a carpenter—that was his job.
  - But his vocation was Messiah—that was what he was meant to do.
  - For us, no matter what our jobs may be, each of us is called to the vocation of disciple of Jesus Christ.
    - And each of us is, in some way, meant to participate in the work of God.
- We were discussing this in youth group just a couple of weeks ago.
  - We were chatting about the fact that Jesus chose us to be his disciples and that in doing so, he in essence is saying “I think you can do, what I do.”
  - And we acknowledged what Jesus did—he healed the sick and lame.
    - He fed those who were hungry.

- He freed those, held captive to sin.
- He gave hope to those who were downtrodden.
- He gave his all to bring people into God’s Kingdom.
- As our youth group discussed this, we resolved that in our vocation as disciples of Jesus, we are expected to figure out how those same actions get translated into our daily lives.
- For some of us, our jobs may take us to work each day.
  - Or to school.
  - Or to watch grandkids.
  - Or on a volunteer board.
  - Or elsewhere.
- For everyone of us as Jesus’ disciples, we are called to reach out to those who are sick, hungry and defeated and show them the Kingdom of God.

## Rosa Parks

- On December 1, 1955, an African American woman in her early forties got on a city bus in Montgomery, Alabama, and did something she wasn’t supposed to do:
  - She sat down at the front of the bus in one of the seats reserved for white people.
  - That was a dangerous act, in a society that was at the time, racist.
  - Rosa Parks was a seamstress—that was her job.
    - But her vocation was disciple of Jesus Christ.
- The story is told that years later, a graduate student asked Rosa, “Why did you sit down at the front of the bus that day?” and Rosa Parks answered, “I sat down because I was tired.”
  - Rosa didn’t sit down to launch a civil rights movement.
  - **Or did she?**
  - Rosa had studied the strategies of nonviolence at the same school where Martin Luther King Jr. had been a student.
    - And she was secretary of the local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, where the members had been discussing civil disobedience.

- When Rosa Parks sat down at the front of the bus on that December day, she had no idea whether the theory of nonviolence would work, or whether her community would back her up.
- For Rosa, it was a just a moment of truth, a moment of reclaiming her birthright as a child of God.
  - She sat down because she tired.
  - She sat down because had reached a point in her life where it was essential to embrace her true vocation—as a disciple of Jesus Christ.
    - And it was her time to participate in the work of God in the world, no matter what the cost to her.

### God's Hope for the World

- Author and theologian, Barbara Brown Taylor tells the story of a time when she gave a speech on the ministry of the laity as God's best hope for the world.
  - Afterward, one of her listeners came to her and said, "I'm sorry, but I don't want to be that important."
  - For some of us, our baptismal call may be an invitation to **DO** more.
    - To teach Sunday School.
    - To help with Youth Ministry or Vacation Bible School.
    - To help take care of the building and grounds.
  - For others, our baptismal call may be an invitation to **BE** more.
    - To be more generous with our time and money.
    - To be more loving.
    - To be more active in our faith.
- **For ALL of us**, our baptismal call involves being who we already are and doing what we already do—but with the understanding that each of us is God's being in this world.
- And whether we like it or not, we are that important.
- Whether we want to be or not, we are God's best hope for the world.
- Amen.