

3rd Sunday of Advent Dec 11, 2022

“What did you go out to the desert to see?”

So says Jesus to the disciples of John the Baptist, people who were sent by a captive John to find out if Jesus was “the one”. Jesus (as he often does) doesn’t answer their question directly. Rather he gives them an enigmatic kind of answer, one that challenges them to consider a much different question, one that can be summed up in just a few words . . .

What were you expecting?

Our expectations matter, maybe even more than we are aware of. They matter in our schoolwork. They matter in in the jobs we take. They matter in our relationships with our children. They matter in our marriages. And they even matter in matters of faith.

The Prophet Isaiah foretold of a world which would have been completely unexpected (as we heard in our First Reading), a world in which the desert blooms, feeble hands are made strong, weak knees are made firm, the eyes of the blind are opened, the deaf hear, the lame leap, and the mute sing. What world is he talking about? That’s not the world I know.

St. James (in our Second Reading) described an unexpected world in which followers of Jesus are patient with each other and patient for hardship to pass and for things to get better. He even imagines a world in which we do not complain about one another. Yes, really. What world is he talking about? That’s not the world I know.

And Jesus (in our Gospel passage from St. Luke) describes a “kingdom” unlike the one most people believed the Messiah would usher in. This kingdom is not one of worldly power. This kingdom is not one of self-importance. This kingdom is certainly not one of wealth or military might. Rather this is a kingdom nearly the opposite of what people expected, one in which those who appeared to be the least were actually the greatest, and

one in which even the dead are raised. Yes, really. What world is he talking about? That's not the world I know.

Today, we find ourselves at the exact midpoint of Advent - fourteen days down and fourteen to go. And despite the hectic nature of this time of year, we are invited to wait patiently. We are invited to joyfully anticipate. And we are invited to hold on to faith-filled expectations. But what are they? What can they be? What must they be?

What in the world are we expecting to happen in two weeks?

If we are expecting the world to continuing being . . .

. . . a place in which everyone strives to get as much as they can - then that's the world we might find.

. . . a place in which every slight, every wrong must be avenged - then that's the world we might find.

. . . a place in which each person judges just about everyone else, presuming they are the "problem" - then that's the world we might find.

. . . a place in which we do more "using" of one another than "caring for" one another - then that's the world we might find.

. . . a place in which no one forgives, or tries to understand, or dries the tears of others, or looks out for those who are alone in this world - then that's the world we might find.

In other words, if we continue to expect that the world will always be the same as it has been - it will be. And if we expect the world to always work a certain way - it will be. And most importantly, if we expect ourselves to remain the same - we will be. That's why expectations matter.

But if we are expecting something else, if we are expecting SOMEONE else, then maybe that kingdom Jesus describes (a kingdom both present and yet still becoming) will be more realized, more clearly revealed to a world in desperate need of healing and compassion and peace and hope and joy . . . and life.

And so, if you find yourselves like I sometimes do, listening to the words of Sacred Scripture (particularly the words of Jesus as he describes his kingdom) and cynically thinking to yourself, "That's not the world I know," - maybe that's because that's not the world we expect. Maybe deep down we don't think that that world, that kingdom is realistic. Maybe we don't even believe it is possible.

Yet, if we don't believe it's possible, we can be assured that we will get exactly what we expect. But if we believe we can be more, if we believe the world can be more, then we can be assured that God will gift us with that holy present this Christmas - the gift of change, the gift of transformation (through the love of Jesus) - bringing this world a little closer to the way God wants it to be - one person at a time, one little miracle at a time.