



## SUNDAY SERMON

# Great Expectations

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Expectations are a funny thing. We are all intimately familiar with the world of expectations. Having them, being the subject of them, resetting them – expectations are an unavoidable part of life. I, like pretty much all of you in here, learned this truth at a very early age. As a young girl in school I knew that there were certain expectations about my grades. I shuddered to think what would happen to me if I came home with bad grades. My parents were pretty casual about a lot of things – but when it came to grades it was just understood that I was expected to perform to a certain standard which did not make any allowances for failing grades.

Those expectations – of good grades; turned out to work in my favor. I knew my parents expected me to succeed and work hard enough to get good grades. They wanted me to get these good grades so that when it came time for it, I'd have options. And for the most part their high expectations were useful in keeping me on the relatively straight and narrow.

I realize that we're nearing the part of the year where final report cards are coming out soon – let me just say to you students out there: "I'm saying a prayer for all of you."

Here's another example of an expectation: Each Mother's Day I set the expectations for John, my phenomenal partner in life and parenting. I say "Hey John – Mother's Day is soon. Just so you know I have high expectations of you making me feel like the most special, best mother in the world that day." And I say this because I know that if I make it seem like I don't have any expectations – I'm just going to be lying and setting us both up for failure. The day will end with grimaces and sighs and I just want to avoid all of that. So I let John know he better make an effort and lo and behold he does!

Expectations are a tricky thing – we are constantly contending with them. And the nature of the expectations we hold can either work to our health or to our detriment.

Expectations prepare us for life in relationship with ourselves and with other people. But the reality is that things don't always happen as we expect them to. Each person in here has a story of an expectation that was unmet or of being surprised by life.

In this morning's Scripture readings we encounter two very different stories of expectation – God shows up – but not in the ways one imagines or expected.

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In the account from Acts, Paul sees this compelling vision of a man from Macedonia. The impression of this dream is so great that Paul immediately alters the course of the trip and sets sail for Macedonia. I get to this part of the story and I go – Oh Great, now Paul is going to meet this man in Macedonia. Showcase God’s power, share the story of Jesus’ love and the miracle will be complete. Except that’s not what happens. I don’t know if Paul had this expectation – but I did. Why tell me this story about a man in a dream, but then not introduce me to said man. From where I’m sitting I begin to wonder - is this story actually one of success. And to be clear – there is no doubt that this story is one of huge success. Lydia’s conversion is a major milestone for the church. She’s the first European convert. She highlights and affirms Paul’s ministry to the Gentiles, and Lydia happens to be an astonishing woman who no doubt would have been an incredible force for the early church as an independent, well-connected woman in a powerful community.

Even still; the writer of this story very easily could’ve changed one tiny detail of the story and told us that a woman from Macedonia was in Paul’s dream and then we would’ve had this neat narrative arc – Paul dreams that a woman seeking the divine in Macedonia is calling to him, and then he meets said woman. But the writer doesn’t do this – the man in the dream doesn’t become a woman and the lesson for us this morning is made all the richer. The writer has no qualms with upending the readers’ and hearers’ expectations. The writer is not just telling us the story of Lydia’s conversion but is also telling us something about what it means to follow Jesus. Sometimes it means following a dream and just being open to the possibility of divine encounters in people and places beyond our expectations.

Throughout the Gospels Jesus taught this lesson to whomever would listen. Be open, Stay alert, Make yourself available because God wants to breathe new life into you, and to all of Creation, but this may mean letting go of some of your expectations. The Gospel of John this morning highlights this profoundly. The man near the gate has been seeking healing for 38 years. Laying in a state of desperation, Jesus approaches the man and asks the obvious question “Do you want to be made well.” The man’s answer betrays his expectation – he’s not actually expecting that Jesus can heal him, but he does see an able bodied man before him who just might be able to carry him to the place he DOES expect his healing to come from. He’s been looking at the Bethzatha healing pool for years and has long ago concluded that if he can just get to the waters at the right time, healing would be his. This man’s expectations actually distract him from the reality that what he is seeking is right in front of him! Healing is his and yet he’s not even aware that it’s right there.

This day and each day we have the option to be like Paul – following the calling of the Holy Spirit and being open to divine encounters wherever they arise; Or we can be like our dear brother on his mat... Blinded by our expectations. Missing the divine experiences that await us because we don’t yet recognize that the one we’ve been looking for has been standing in front of us the entire time. Amen.