

## Expectations

Daily living is filled with expectations. When you woke up this morning, without even thinking about it, you expected to find your tooth brush and your shoes in certain places. When you got to the kitchen, you expected to find some food that you wanted to eat for breakfast. When you got into your car, you expected it to start. We live each day, filled with expectations.

On this second Sunday of Advent, expectations are on the rise. Advent is filled to overflowing with expectations! We expect to hear the Christmas story. We expect to sing our favourite carols. We expect to see some housecoat and tea towel wearing shepherds. We have some expectations about Christmas Eve and Christmas morning. Sometimes our expectations are met. Sometimes they are not. Sometimes things happen that we never expected!

Here are some famous quotes on expectations...see what you think.

(Slide #1) I find my life a lot easier the lower I keep my expectations. Bill

Watterson

(Slide #2) Expectations are like pottery. The harder you hold them, the more likely they are to crack. Branden Sanderson

(Slide #3) Today expect something good to happen to you no matter what occurred yesterday. Sarah Breathuach

(Slide #4) A wonderful gift may not be wrapped as you expect. Jonathan Huie  
Expectations....Think for a moment of Advent and Christmas images. Angels, ginger bread, short bread, beautiful wrapping paper, one horse open sleighs....There is no season so full of images and with the images come expectations!

I wonder if you have ever been disappointed because of unmet expectations. Perhaps a job or a raise you did not get.....perhaps a visit from a loved one that did not happen....maybe an invitation that did not come.

A young boy named Dennis desperately wanted an animal for Christmas. Guess what the animal was that he wanted....a kangaroo! He thought it would be amazing to have a kangaroo that could jump over a car, and fight, and wear funny clothes. His parents tried to dissuade him. They told him in many many ways not to expect a kangaroo because it was not going to happen. Can you guess how Dennis interpreted his parents' caution? It made him even more convinced that he would be getting a kangaroo!! His excitement and his expectations, grew and grew and grew! One day he asked his parents some

questions about the gift they were getting for him for Christmas. "If I took it to school, would my friends like it?" "Yes, I'm sure they would", they said. "Will I have lots of fun with it?" "Oh we are quite sure you will have lots and lots of fun with it", they said. Dennis knew it was a kangaroo! His expectations were going through the roof.

On Christmas Eve his parents told Dennis that they had to go to the railway station to pick something up. They told him explicitly that when they arrived home, he was not to come outside to greet them, and under no circumstances was he to go into the garage! Denis was going crazy with excitement. His kangaroo was that close! His parents left and came home shortly after. Dennis was obedient to a fault. He did not dare do anything that might jeopardize the gift. In the night, he even heard his father go downstairs and bring something from the garage into the house. Dennis fought to stay tucked into his bed. Dennis knew it must be the kangaroo. He imagined hearing the kangaroo bounding around the living room! Can you picture it?

The next morning Dennis broke a rule he had never broken before. He got up before anyone else in the family and he snuck downstairs. He could contain himself no longer. Under the tree, the special gift for Dennis, was not a kangaroo,

it was a tape recorder. Dennis went out to check the garage, just in case. He looked in the backyard. He checked all the other rooms in the house.....no kangaroo. Dennis raced back up to his bedroom. He buried his face in his pillow and cried his heart out.

Christmas can be that way. Life can be that way. We can build up hopes and dreams that cannot possibly be fulfilled! Christmas can be like this.

And it is so unfortunate, because the real message of Christmas is not about expectations, Christmas is really about what we don't expect! (Slide # 5)

Christmas is about what we don't expect!

The first Scripture today was not an Advent passage but it is about Jesus, it is about expectations, and about grace....the workers all got the same amount of pay, whether they worked for the landowner 1 hour or 8. No one expected that!

Workers who worked all day, expected to be paid more than those who worked only a few hours. Workers who worked 2 hours expected to be paid less than those who worked 4 or 6 or 8 hours.

Think of Zechariah and Elizabeth...who in the world would ever expect that a barren woman and an old man would get pregnant? And what about Mary.....a young, poor servant girl. Who would ever expect that someone like her would

ever get a visit from an angel? And why, with so many more suitable candidates....why Mary to give birth to God's Son? No one expected that! Shepherds spend their time protecting their sheep. They certainly never expected to be visited by angels! The Wisemen expected the Son of God to be born in a palace. They did not expect he would be born in a manger. Who would expect that? And of all places, a simple little town like Bethlehem? You have got to be kidding. Who would ever expect that?

And that was just the beginning. Jesus continued to teach, and do, and call us to be and do everything that no one would ever expect. He loved the loveless and the unloveable. He called us to love our enemies. He insisted we forgive those who have hurt us. With Jesus, we have come to expect the unexpected.

So for Christmas, for this Christmas in particular I want you to be watching and waiting for what you don't expect. God is full of surprises. I want you to look for what you are not expecting to see.

Look and see, listen and hear what you always see and hear at Christmas time, but be open to surprise this year. It is possible that God might come to you this Christmas in fresh new ways. A familiar song might speak to you in ways it never has. A beloved Christmas story might speak to you in ways it never has.

Theologian Robert McAfee Brown wrote *Creative Dislocation*: The movement of grace. Brown discovered that the greatest things that had happened to him were things he never expected, things he did not plan for, and sometimes things that didn't seem like blessings at the time. "To speak of grace", he said, "is to say that the things most worth expecting are the things that are unexpected." Grace is the way God has of surprising us.

John Killinger suggests that this Christmas, let's wise up! Let's not look for God in all the old familiar places, let's look for God in places where we never thought to look....in our failures and burdens and losses: in the cake we didn't bake, the person we did not hear from, the guest who did not come, the job we lost, the course we flunked, the relationship we botched, in the illness that kept us in bed, the party we weren't invited to, and even in the present we did not receive.

God is a God of surprise. We never know where they are or where they are coming from....but the gospel tells us that they are there. God is in the places and the circumstances, and the people that we never expect!

Merry Christmas