

In the name of ✝ Jesus.

How did you react to our Presidential election recently past? I think most people's first reaction was a bit of shock and disbelief. Then for some, that was accompanied by elation and hope, and for others with fear and despair. But the reactions seemed especially strong this year, driven, it seems to me, by certain expectations going into the election. Indeed, Mr. Trump is not the President that we expected; he's the one we got. It remains to be seen if he's the President we need.

Today in our Gospel lesson, it seems to me, that expectations are driving the questions we hear, both John's question to Jesus, and Jesus' question to the people. And the answers remind us that God does not always give us what we expect, but what we need.

After Jesus sent John's disciples back to him, Jesus began asking the people: "*What did you go out into the wilderness to see?*" The people were looking for the Messiah, the coming king, and they knew that He would be preceded by the forerunner, a prophet heralding His coming. And John was indeed that "*messenger [sent] before [the Messiah's] face, who will prepare [His] way before [Him],*" but he was not at all the herald one might expect for a king. He was no "*man dressed in soft clothing*" living "*in [a] king's house.*" You remember John's attire, his appearance. Nor was John a "*reed*" blown about by the winds of political expediency as one might expect to find in the service of a king. His message was single-minded: "*Repent*" as you prepare for the reign of the coming King. "*Bear fruit in keeping with repentance.*"

John did indeed herald the way of the Lord: there is One "*coming after me [who] is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry, [who] will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.*" He pointed to Jesus as the Lamb of God who will bear the sins of the world. John's own father prophesied of the heralding work of his son: "*the prophet of the Most High.*" He would "*give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins*" as he would proclaim "*the tender mercy of our God, ... [in] the sunrise [that would] visit us from on high.*" That's the message the people needed to hear, and we do still today.

John's question to Jesus also betrays a "you're not what I expected" uneasiness in John. From prison John sent his disciples to Jesus with a question: "*Are you the coming one or should we look for someone else?*" Where is that strong "*horn of salvation*" that my father sang about? Where is that King from the "*house of his servant David*" who was coming to save us "*from our enemies and [deliver us] from the hand of all who hate us.*"

Jesus sent John's disciples back to John: "it's not the Messiah that you expected, but it's the Messiah that you need." You expected a Messiah with a *"winnowing fork is in his hand, [who] will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."* You expected a Messiah who would *"strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and ... kill the wicked" "with the breath of his lips."* You expected *"your God [the Messiah who would] come with vengeance, with the recompense of God"* as He comes to save you.

This may be the Messiah that you expected—one who would deal with the political problem of Rome—but the Messiah that you need is dealing with a much more pressing problem: sin and all of its corruption. So, *"Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them,"* just as the prophet Isaiah foretold. The Messiah that you need is the one whose kingdom is not of this world, who came from heaven to dwell with sinners. The Messiah that you need came as Savior in weakness here and poverty. He is the Messiah who neither refuses crib nor cross. The Messiah that you need is the Lamb who bleeds, who sacrifices Himself for your redemption, but the Lamb who lives and reigns, and who will come again *"with righteousness [to] judge the poor, and ... with equity [to decide] for the meek of the earth."*

Dear friends, it's His own righteousness whereby Jesus judges the poor — the judgment has been made. Christ was held guilty; we poor sinners are acquitted. Christ our King was punished; we miserable sinners are set free. Surely this is not what you expect from your law-breaking, and aren't you glad? You receive not justice, but grace, for the Messiah that you needed—not the one you expected—was sent from heaven to endure it all for you — your sins, your punishment, God's righteous wrath — He took it all on Himself for you, that in Him, looking to Him, trusting in Him, you might become the righteousness of God.

Dear friends, now more than ever the world needs to be reminded that God's ways are not our ways. God is not bound by our expectations. His ways are better; His ways are higher (Is. 55:8-9). He knows what we need — redemption, the forgiveness of our sins — and He sent His Son Jesus, not to fulfill our expectations, but to address our need.

Nor is Christ's church here to try to fulfill our expectations, tainted by sin. The church is here to distribute what Christ so richly fulfilled by His poverty—and that has nothing to do with material prosperity wearing soft clothing, with living in king's palaces, with political power or influence. The church is here, by water and word and Supper, to give you what you need, for what Christ earned by His cross

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2000 years ago comes to you today at this Divine Service: forgiveness, everlasting life, and salvation.

So set aside your doubts. Don't be offended by Christ. He may not be the Messiah you expect or desire, but He is the Messiah you need. And His church, built on this Rock—with steeples that seem to be falling and spires that seem to be crumbling—Christ's church shall stand firm against every wind of false doctrine, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against her. For here, too, not based on your expectations, but on your needs, you were washed at the font and told how God received you. Here at this altar, Christ's sacrifice is recalled, and here you are given His body and blood, the food that endures to eternal life. Here sound the Scriptures that proclaim Christ yesterday, today, the same, and who is evermore your Redeemer.

So, no matter how this upcoming administration turns out or how the next election turns out, this is no occasion to doubt or despair—as John seemed to do: “You're not what I expected, Lord.” It's a time to rejoice in the Lord, always, and especially as you come to the altar today. The Messiah you need is serving you with Himself. Again, I say, rejoice.

In the name of the Father and of the ✝ Son and of the Holy Spirit.