

“What Do You Expect?”

Isaiah 5:7-13; 1 Corinthians 12:4-27;
Luke 20:9-16

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I was thinking about the time I went to the store and I picked up a fishing reel. I thought, “Wow! This is cheap!” I went out to use it, and it *was* cheap. My wife, Helen, turned to me and said, “Well, what do you expect?”

It’s that idea of “what did you expect” that I want to think about. Sometimes we expect that we’re going to get a great deal, and find out we got what we probably should have expected instead. What do you expect?

When I think about something coming, what I expect is how I prepare for it. It is a natural thing to do. We prepare according to what we expect might happen. I still go to events and think I’m supposed to dress up. That’s an expectation that seems to be changing, but it’s what I expect. But then there are times when I go to something and I expect one thing and get another. If I go to an amusement park I would expect to have fun. That’s not always been my experience, but it is that exact thing that I’m thinking about. Part of my disappointment with something is because of what I expected from it.

As I think about my expectations, it leads me also to think what I’m looking for. In Isaiah, it talks about what people get up early in the morning searching for. In Isaiah, it’s not a particularly helpful thing, but it does show what someone is looking for, what they expect of their day, perhaps. So we can begin to think about what we expect of our day. What would we get up early to go searching for and what do we expect to find?

We have all kinds of expectations. We live with them. We deal with them. When we give somebody a gift, what do we expect? Do we expect a thank you? Do we expect that they will take the gift and put it in the trash can? We try to give without any expectations of something in return, but really do we give without *any* expectations? If you had a child or had been helping somebody and you are giving of your time, you are giving them something that gives them a leg up—you give a child life, food, a place to live, some education—you then have *no* expectations? I suspect we all would have some kind of expectation out of that. The gifts we give come with some expectations.

As I’m thinking about those kinds of expectations that we live with, there’s an expectation I have that I can go to God. I have expectations of God. I think I have an easier time having expectations of God—coming and wanting something, coming to God with my needs—than going to God and asking, “What are your expectations of me?” I’d much rather say, “I have these expectations and these things that I want” than to say, “And what is it you want of *me*?” And yet as we think about the gifts God has given us, there’s no sense of expectation?

I think that is what Jesus is saying as he talks about the vineyard, God’s pleasant planting, in today’s Gospel reading. When you plant something, give it life, spend a lot of time on it, you expect it to grow. When I plant a grapevine, I’ll give it water, and I’ll cultivate it as the vineyard would be cultivated. I don’t expect that after all that it won’t do anything. Eventually, I should get at least a few grapes. My expectation is that if I try those grapes, they will be sweet and flavorful.

We have expectations of things because of what they are. A vineyard produces grapes. The cultivated vineyard produces something. God's cultivated community produces something. That's what it is. Just like a vine is living out what it is by producing grapes, God's vineyard is expected to produce something. What is that?

We can look at Isaiah for one. What does he say there? "I expected justice. I expected righteousness." God has some expectations out of his pleasant plantings that something will happen—justice and righteousness.

I have to go back and define those words, partly because it's so easy just to say them and to have a whole bunch of baggage with them. For me, righteousness is always about right relationship. It's the idea that when we're righteous, we're living in right relationship with one another. Our lives are made better, we thrive better together. That's a sense of righteousness.

What's justice? In some ways justice and righteousness are flip sides of the same coin. Sometimes the same word can be translated either way. The slight difference here, and it is a different word, is that it's about the idea of judgment. What are the decisions that are being made? So when we think about justice, it's the act of decision-making that's going on, and are those decisions good for the people. Are they good for everyone? So it's the decisions that help us live in right relationships.

It's interesting to me that it seems that what God wants to come out of God's vineyard is God's people living in righteousness and justice—God's people living together in a way that we produce sweet grapes. God's people living together. In fact, it feels like God makes the vineyard so that we have a place to live that way. The reason the community is cultivated is so that we can live together well and make those decisions that are good for all. In fact, it's a place, then, where we begin to find the gifts that each of us has. I suppose we could say that it's like a vineyard that has multiple kinds of grapes in it. It gives you more flavor.

Moving into what Paul is talking about in First Corinthians, the gifts that are given are then for the good of the community. We find those as we gather together. Some of our gifts, I think, are discovered because we get together. Then we are given the opportunity to use them for the good of the community, and that community will produce sweet grapes, good stuff.

So it is as we gather, we're called to be that vineyard—God's pleasant planting. We expect grapevines to produce great grapes. God seems to expect as we plant a community of faith that it also will produce great grapes—righteousness, justice, grace. I'm not sure that's real easy to do, but it certainly works out better when we do that together. That's what I expect God wants of us. What do you expect?

Gracious God, as we are planted here together let our roots grow deep into the grace that you've given us, that we might grow and be a community of faith in which the produce you expect is evident. Let us be a place where righteousness and justice thrive. Let us be a place where gifts are discovered and used for the good of all. Let us begin to live into the expectations that you have for us that also lead us to the wonder of life. Through Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.