

Sermon Text for December 15, 2019

by Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

Isaiah 35: 1-10 Matthew 11: 2-6

“Not the kind of Messiah That You Would Expect.”

I wrote an enews this week that produced a lot of feedback, and also created for me personally at least, a lot of introspection on how I do things, and what I assume and so as a result what I expect. I also hope it created some introspection within us as a congregation as we analyze and try to discern how we treat and how we view those who may not fit the traditional bill and those who may not check all the boxes that we think ought to be checked to be accepted within our society, our culture, and as I found out, our church.

I wrote about our new ministry beginning in January with single moms. I got a slew of emails from single moms who had visited the church and then left because they had felt judged. Again, it is nothing we do purposefully, it is just the way that we are wired to view a mom without kids, as not complete, as flawed, or even as a sinner before we even engage with them in a meaningful conversation. Expectation often get in the way of ministry and create a barrier to full engagement with people across many cross sections within our community.

The last few weeks we have been looking at what our expectations are in regards to this Advent season. We saw a king that we would not expect in Jesus. We saw a second coming which we would not expect. Last week we saw a Jesus that we would not expect. This week we come across a Messiah that we would not expect. Today we see a question is asked in Scripture and Jesus demands that those asking that question understand what they expect is very different from whom he is as the Messiah. In the first century a certain Messiah was expected, but Scripture showed clearly that there was another possibility, one that the people would not expect. That is who he was. We are challenged today to embrace a Messiah that we would not expect. Let's read.

READ

We spent a bunch of time last week on John the Baptist and came to understand that his role was to point to Jesus who had come to save us from our sins. We begin again with John the Baptist but we see that he had his own disciples and they were sent on a mission to ask Jesus a question. So we begin with Matthew saying matter of factly that Jesus, who by the way was the Messiah, was approached by John's disciples, because John was in prison so couldn't come

himself, and they asked him the question: “Are you the one who is to come, or should we wait for another?” There is so much that is stated as fact that is shocking.

Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ, the anointed one, the one sent by God to free his people. Matthew lays it out there as if everyone knew it, except the ones who came and asked the question, John’s disciples, so, are you the one? We read that John is in prison, we alluded to that last week. John was seen as a threat, he wasn’t a nobody, he was a somebody that the authorities had to be controlled or else things could get out of hand. Those who followed him, his disciples, John had his own disciples, we see them again in Acts as they are baptized with the baptism of John and not the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and they come with the question: are you the one?

It is a surprising question not because of the question itself, anyone could have wondered if Jesus is the Messiah. Even in chapter 12 we see the people ask a similar question: “can this be the Son of David?” It was a fair question, but not from John. We set you up last week with the understanding that John knew who Jesus was and was preparing the way for him so that people would follow him as the Messiah. So why the question now from John? Where does this doubt come from, if it was doubt?

Where was John in this chapter? In prison, when you are in prison you can start doubting what you were convinced is God’s promise. When you are under stress and pressure and anxiety and afraid then all that you once believed was true, what you counted on earlier can seem to dissipate before your very eyes and seem a little further away. The higher the waves become in life the less likely it can feel that a lifeline is going to be thrown your way. So Jesus, look at us, I’m in prison, your people are being persecuted, and you are just going around doing good things for people. Aren’t you going to free us and liberate us, and bring a victory to us like the Bible says you are going to do? Are you the one, or should we wait for another?

Is Jesus the one? Or should we wait for someone else who is the chosen one? Sometimes our current realities cause us to question even the most basic things in our lives. Even our most basic beliefs, our faith itself, can seem cloudy when we find ourselves in doubt. This isn’t at all what I would expect when I said I do to my Savior, when I turned my life over to Him. What do we expect from our Messiah?

I’m guessing what we expect from our Messiah is very different from what the people of the 1st century expected. We know that in Jesus’ day the expectation was that there would come a messiah who would lead Israel to a re-establishing of Zion and the Jewish people to kick off

the yoke off slavery that they currently had under the Roman rule. In the first century there were many who came and tried to lead revolts and overthrow the Roman rule but they were always quickly crushed. When we were in Israel we saw Masada which was a fortress that the Macabbeans took over until Rome destroyed it and them.

Jesus himself had at least one disciple who was a part of that movement. Remember his disciple Simon described by Luke as the zealot? He was a revolutionary who was expecting the Messiah to come and bring a military victory. It is thought that Jude and even Judas were also zealots so you can understand the betrayal of Judas in that light, if they were expecting a Messiah who would bring military victory and he cared more for the poor and prostitutes and people like them who carried no political clout and no military assets, well, we are just wasting our time. Are you really the one? You are not really what we would expect.

It was easy to find in the Old Testament Scriptures that would enforce this understanding of a militant Messiah. Look at our first Scripture for today, but just cut out a few of the verses, especially 3 and 4 and then also 10. God comes with a vengeance and delivers a military victory to the point where in vs.10 we read that those who have been in captivity, the people of Isaiah and the people of the 1st century will return to Jerusalem as the masters of their house.

But when Jesus is asked are you the one to come he answers with verse from Isaiah 35, but not the ones that you would expect. He doesn't answer with verses 3 and 4 but rather with verses 5 and following in the midst of verses that talk about deserts blossoming and other events that you would not expect. Are you the one? Jesus answers, well, what do you see and hear around you? What is happening around you? Isaiah is being fulfilled, but not in the way that you would expect. Jesus here redefines the expectations of who the Messiah is based upon an image of the Messiah which was dramatically different than what was present in the 1st century.

While people expected a Messiah to bring a military conquest, Jesus pointed to other Scriptures to say this is the Messiah who is to come. Look at Ezekiel 34, if you read the whole chapter that would be good, but look at specifically vs.23 where we read that God will set up over his people one shepherd who will be in the line of David. This shepherd will strengthen the weak, heal the sick, bind up the injured, bring back the lost. He doesn't appeal to the verse in Scripture which speak of judgment that will come which will destroy the nations who have turned their back on Israel.

This is the story not of a religious hero like we expect from the Messiah, but rather of a dying Savior. Because of that we are forced to confront the reality that often we place Jesus as a theoretical decision in our life, in what category does he fit. While all along Jesus demands that he be an existential choice, what does it mean for me that Jesus is Lord, is Messiah, the anointed one to lead me. The Messiah that Jesus is defies our expectations in a time when we think we need a militant Jesus to turn things upside down, he points to that which we ought to be focusing on in order for us to recognize that he has given us what we need in order to fulfill Scripture.

Is Jesus the one? Was he the one in John's time? In John's time the political reality was anything but stable. People had come and gone and claimed to be the one, but they weren't, they all died without the glory of God's kingdom being established. They were looking for a freedom fighter, so when Jesus was anything but, the questions were coming, are you the one? His answer didn't provide any clarity. Who cares what happens to the blind, lame, sick, deaf, mourning, and poor? What are you going to do for us now? That is all that is important now. The impact the Messiah, the chosen one, can make is for me here in now.

How fragile is our faith that when we face a storm and no one comes to calm it do we wonder if this Jesus is really all he is cracked up to be. We expect Jesus to bring us comfort and relief and help us as we face economic ruin, as we face our children turning to substances over a Savior, as our country continues to divide. Jesus the Messiah, the one I hear about in church doesn't have an answer for this. My faith is relegated to Sunday, or Tuesday evening or morning Bible Study, or Men's prayer breakfast. The Messiah has no answer for events outside of my spiritual life.

Often we think that we are the only ones who can take matters into our own hands. Like Judas in many ways God will only help those who help themselves so we should not be in the business of enabling people. I picked myself up by my bootstraps and now you should do it too. We are not going to be involved in enabling people who are lazy and unmotivated. After all, Jesus said you will have the poor with you always.

That is what we expect to hear and what we expect people to say, and it sounds just about right. This year I can't tell you how grateful I am for the generosity that you have shown to the ministry of this church. If things continue on the pace that they are going for the next few weeks we will have a bit of a record year in many ways. We expect our mission budget to be fully funded including the extra mile giving which is really an extraordinary way in which you reflect

the love that you have for God and God's people. Remember Matthew 25? We do here at First Presbyterian fulfill that on an individual and on a communal level.

I want to be careful here because you need to understand how proud I am of you and how extraordinary of a church you are in the way that your generosity is reflected in your giving. At the end of the year we give back to our mission agencies whatever we have not spent above and beyond our budget, so if for Water Street we have \$6,000 budgeted we could potentially give them another \$10,000 on top of that if we have the money left over. It is an amazing time in the life of this church to see how we disburse the funds left over.

This year I expect that we will have more funds left over than what we have ever had in recent memory. The ministries that are doing amazing things will be blessed even more by our disbursements, that is my expectations. But I believe that it is one thing to be able to bless with finances and it is another thing to be able to be blessed as you personally interact, assist, volunteer, and get involved on a personal grass level with those in need. Right now our food bank is one of the few places in this church where we are forced to interact with the neediest in our community. We can choose to go to Water Street, or Lancaster Council of Church, or Mom's House or somewhere else other than here at First Presbyterian and volunteer, but our ability to reach out to the community with our own ministry is limited.

Could 2020 be a year that we do fulfill what Jesus says in Matthew what do you see and hear that is happening around you, that is happening here at First Presbyterian? Yes, with our finances we are fulfilling Matthew 25, but trust me when I say that when we fulfill it with our time and our energy right here at FPC it is altogether a different experience, and it is one that you would not expect. The Messiah calls us to a life of being involved right here and right now, as well as beyond these walls into the larger community. Let's do that. Amen.