

No Expectations

1 Thessalonians 3: 9-13 and Luke 21: 25-36

A question. What would you do to mark this holy time of preparation; to mark the preparation for Christmas, for the coming of your salvation? What would you do to mark it if nothing was expected this year; if you were not expected to give gifts, put up decorations, cook, bake or even travel? Asked another way: what would you do to prepare for a whole week set aside to celebrate how much God loves us? That's what's going to happen at the end of the month. We are going to take a few days to solely worship, rest and gather with others all to celebrate that we are created whole and loved fully. And, all that by a naked baby!

I know this might be a little startling to you. Right now all over the internet and in specialized areas of your nearest bookstore, you can purchase lists of what is expected of you this year and how to get them all done in Advent. That if you do some baking now and you prepare the pudding now, then next you would prepare the shopping list, then next you would... (you get the idea).

What if nothing was expected? No gifts. No decorations. No big meal. No travel plans. Now, I know what you are thinking. You are thinking: Leigh, where in the world did you get this weird idea? A non-shopping, non-collecting, non-decorating Advent? Where would you get this message of a sanctuary that would be free of decorations or an empty Advent wreath? What is going on?

Well, it was kind of Jesus' idea. I mean, God tried to make a hint at the fact that Mary and Joseph weren't prepared in any way. The inn wasn't ready, even the poor cow was not prepared. Instead, the least prepared couple in the world came to the least prepared country on Earth, to definitely the least prepared inn and stable. And when that babe grew up, he said to be on guard that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life because that day will catch you like a trap if you do.

Jesus was talking about the end of days. The time when God will meet us face to face. So, perhaps we could take a few hints from Jesus preparing for the other face to face meeting we get to have. Our yearly reminder that God wants to meet us through and with Christ.

Be on guard for three things that can weigh you down in such a way that you will miss the hope and the peace that God is bringing. So, three things, and I will admit I had to look up *dissipation*. Drunkenness, I knew about it. Worriedness, oh I am so good at that, but *dissipation*?

Jesus is saying today to not get weighed down with the squandering of money, energy or resources, all striving to meet other expectations. You can share your money with those you love and those in need, but do not squander it just to look good. Do not pour out your resources thinking that God can love you more if you do. God can't love you anymore than God already loves you. So, no matter how well or horrendously you decorate, no matter how well or horrendously you bake, it doesn't even matter if you sing Christmas carols or not, God is going to be there.

Now, Jesus does warn us against drunkenness. So let us do this *literally* and figuratively. If any of you in the room have experience over indulging with drink, you might think of some reasons you do it. Do you do it to look cool, or just to feel relaxed around uncle so-and-so? Maybe you do it to show how rich you are: Look at my liquor cabinet!! If any of you have any experience of any of this, then you will also know that it usually leads to physical uncomfotableness, but it also leads to regrets. Usually, you end up missing a real connection and the next days' activities.

Now *figuratively*, we all over-indulge. Some people make sure they are at every party; some people make sure they are at every church event; some people make sure that every single person they've ever thought of gets a Christmas card. All this in the hopes that we can show others that we understand Christmas or that we are cool or amazing or rich. Most of all, a lot of times, we are doing this all to show everyone that we are *happy*.

But the thing is with this season, the long nights, its high expectations; usually this is not a month where happiness is easy, and that it okay. Do you think Mary was happy? Hopeful, yes. Do you think Joseph was happy? "Scared to death", might be closer to his emotions. God's love shows up when you are happy, but God's love sinks in when you are sad or lonely, when all you have is hope and no joy. This season will bring these emotions. And to over-indulge in something just to pretend they are not, will not help God love you more. God calls us not to hide from all that this season brings, but to sink into the love of Christ during it all.

Now, lastly Jesus warns us to not get weighed down by worries. This was a man who lived without the internet telling him how many worries he should have. I mean, think of the things he did not know about. He didn't even know about North America and what might occur there if anyone went there except for the people who were already there. He didn't know about global warming. He didn't even really understand that there was a globe.

Yet right away, he says: people, humans, oh my gosh, you are so weighed down! Try to realize that when you are striving to spend, decorate and cook for another's expectations, your worry is

going to turn into debt and exhaustion. Those will turn into resentment and soon you will be blaming everyone you ever tried to impress. Jesus instead says: squander your love. If you love to decorate, decorate. If you love to cook, cook. If you love to be at everything at the church this season then goodness gracious, please be. But please also remember that this is not why God loves you and it is not why Jesus is coming.

God loves you.

Jesus is coming.

Thanks be to God. Amen.