

## “Expectation”

the Rev. Todd R. Goddard, pastor  
[Zion West Walworth United Methodist Church](#)  
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### Luke 3:7- 18

John said to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, ‘You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruits worthy of repentance. Do not begin to say to yourselves, “We have Abraham as our ancestor”; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even now the axe is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.’

And the crowds asked him, ‘What then should we do?’ In reply he said to them, ‘Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise.’ Even tax- collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, ‘Teacher, what should we do?’ He said to them, ‘Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you.’ Soldiers also asked him, ‘And we, what should we do?’ He said to them, ‘Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages.’

As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, John answered all of them by saying, ‘I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing- fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing- floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.’

Prayer.

“Be careful what you wish for,  
you just might get it”  
is a warning that crosses  
nearly all disciplines,  
as far as I can tell.  
I’ve known too many preachers  
who longed to be  
elected bishop  
appointed to be superintendent,  
or to this or that  
plumb parish,  
flush with staff, salary, and prestige,  
only to be sent there  
and a year later

to be crying for help and a move.  
For the registered nurse  
it is to become the charge,  
for the charge to become the head,  
and for the head to become the  
director of nursing.  
For the teacher  
it is to become the department chair,  
the administrator, or  
the college president  
or district superintendent.  
For the assembler,  
to become the leader,  
the foreman, or the boss.  
For many who make the ascent  
through the lens of hindsight

they think to themselves,  
“what did I get myself into?”  
or “I should have just left  
well enough alone.”

The problem, as I see it  
is when expectation is unbalanced  
by an incomplete imagination,  
an uninformed  
or misinformed  
perception of reality.  
“When I am president”  
the candidate is easy to stump  
“life will be a lot better  
than it is right now.”

This season of Advent  
is one about expectation;  
**building anticipation**  
through memory  
- the Christ who was born a baby in  
Bethlehem,  
**looking forward**  
for Emmanuel,  
- Christ with us,  
celebrated with his birth on Christmas  
day,  
**wishing for**  
a messiah  
- a return of Christ,  
who will come and save us  
into God’s everlasting glory  
and eternal kingdom.

Be careful what you wish for.

Don’t take it from me;  
listen to the prophet,  
John the Baptist:  
“be careful what you wish for”  
is the unspoken warning  
embedded in today’s text.

Savior is only half the picture.  
Christ’s return is unbalanced

without a winnowing fork,  
without an unquenchable fire.

Generally, we don’t deny  
judgmental characteristics of Christ,  
we just don’t focus on them,  
hoping that this is just some  
simple theological or divine oversight  
that grace will ultimately correct.  
We overcompensate  
and place the focus on Savior  
and hope no one notices  
the Christ who is coming to  
be our Judge.

“So, you’re a descendant of Abraham,  
are you?”  
John the Baptist correctly states,  
“Don’t count on your blood line  
to save you.”  
So much for being a chosen people.

“So, you claim to be a disciple of Christ,  
are you?”  
John the Baptist correctly recognizes,  
“I certainly hope you’ve produced  
good fruit throughout your life.  
If you haven’t,  
expect to be pruned along with  
the other branches  
that bear no good fruit  
and are tossed  
into the unquenchable fire.”  
So much for being a C&E Christian,  
on Christmas and Easter,  
in name only.

“So,” we whine  
like the multitudes  
two millennia before us  
“what are we to do?”

Poverty and justice  
are priorities of Jesus  
- and they are prophesized by John.

Simply put, in John's words,  
**"Right the wrongs of injustice.  
Cloth those who have no cloths,  
repay what you've stolen,  
do not extort,  
do not threaten,  
do not lie!  
- and be satisfied with  
what God has given you."**

John may not be as poetic  
as Jesus  
preaching the Beatitudes  
or as eloquent  
as the Deuteronomist  
converting stone to text  
penning the Ten Commandments,  
but, I would suggest,  
he comes in a close  
and consistent  
third!

"Come a Savior, Come a King"  
"Simply Waiting"  
"O Come, O Come Emmanuel"  
"Come, Thou Long- Expected Jesus"  
"Prepare the Way of the Lord"  
"All Earth Is Waiting"  
or so we anticipate  
this time of Advent's expectation.

Be careful for what you wish for.

We long for a savior,  
but we fear the judge.  
The reality is they go hand- in- hand.  
Right the wrongs,  
cure injustice where ever you find it,  
and treat every person you meet  
as a child of God,  
as a reflection of our Creator.  
Bear good fruit.  
Don't just bear fruit.  
Bear *good* fruit  
worthy of the one who will judge us  
who will separate us

grain from chaff  
fruit from flower, leaf, or stalk.

Like the author, Garrison Keillor  
who ends his daily radio broadcast  
with "Be well,  
do good work,  
and keep in touch"  
so, too, does the prophet John  
speak this day,  
"Be well,  
bear *good* fruit,  
and prepare the way of the Lord."  
Amen.