

Heavenly Expectations

Matt 21:18-22:14

I hope you have been better at buying flowers than I have. I have made the mistake of projecting my preferences upon others and I have had a negative experience with flowers for much of my life due to seasonal allergies. Flowers mean sneezing, watery itchy eyes, a running nose and a head full of congestion. But, I've been listening to the counsel of Rush Limbaugh and he claimed that flowers are the best gift that you can give on Mother's Day. Other gifts are ok, but they will never be as good as flowers. So, I listened to Rush and to Rita and I sent flowers for Mother's Day to my step-mom who has carried the burden of taking care of my dad for these last ten years. But if I was going to send flowers to my step-mom, what about my mom? So I sent her flowers too. But then, what about my daughter who has carried a heavy burden this year, caring for the special needs of our granddaughter and so I also sent her Mother's Day flowers but if I was going to send flowers to my daughter, what about Rita? So I also sent Rita flowers. But Rush was wrong. The flowers did not work every time. They worked 3 out of 4 times but not every time. Rita and Virginia and Leah each loved their flowers but my mom wanted to know why I didn't order them from my cousin since he sends more of a variety and she was going to take hers to church and give them away because there were too many and she only needed one. But she's just too ornery to just accept a gift, my sisters gave her a new puzzle but she told them the pieces were too small and they should just get one out of the thrift store where they just cost a dollar. On the other hand, my grandson, Peter, apparently was impressed by the flowers I sent to his mother and this has led him to the conclusion that grandpa likes flowers and so he has texted me pictures of some rhododendrums since they are in the middle of their rhododendrum festival in Port Townsend. This is more than I have gotten from him all year and so I'm running with it, although I'm going to send him pictures of my boat and see if I can get him back on track.

We are used to Mother's Day and birthdays, Christmas and other holidays raising the expectations of our loved ones. It is wise to try to meet those expectations. This is much better than disappointing your loved one.

Our Scripture today has to do with heaven's expectations both then, that is when Jesus entered Jerusalem with a demonstration that we call the triumphal entry and that we celebrate on Palm Sunday and now. When Jesus came into the city that day, He came as the Messiah and came as that was prophesied in the O.T. But outside of the participants in the demonstration, no one cared. The Passover preparations continued in the temple as if nothing had happened and, in fact, those preparations were offensive for they compromised God's intended purpose for the temple itself and Jesus put on the second demonstration of the day and drove the moneychangers out of the temple.

After this, Jesus left the city, stayed overnight in Bethany, most likely in the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus and returned to the city the next morning. On the way in He found no figs on the Fig tree and cursed the tree so that it immediately withered away. He was challenged by the temple authorities who wanted to know how He had the authority to do the things He had done. Jesus answered the question with His question about the baptism of John and then told the story of the two sons. Both were told by their father to go to work in the vineyard and so the one son said that he wouldn't go but later felt badly about it so he went. The other son said that he would go to work but then he felt badly about it and he didn't. Jesus asked, which of the two did the will of his father? He then compared the story to the response of the religious leaders vs that of the tax collectors and prostitutes to the ministry of John the Baptist. Jesus added the story of the landowner who planted a vineyard and then leased it and went to a far country. When it came time for the rent after the harvest the renters refused to pay, beating one of the owners servants, killing another, and stoning a third. Lastly, he sent his son to them to collect but they thought, let's kill him and take the inheritance for ourselves and so they did. Jesus asked, "When the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do?" The people answered, "He will destroy those wicked men miserably, and lease his vineyard to other vinedressers who will render to him the fruits in their seasons." Jesus used their answer to show

the response of God to the leaders and people who were in the very act of rejecting Jesus, God's Son, the Messiah.

In the third story, a king announced the marriage of his son and invited the dignitaries of the kingdom to come to the wedding. When it was time those who were invited made excuses and some even abused and or killed the servants who came to remind them that it was time to come. When this got back to the king, he was furious and he sent his army to destroy those who had mistreated his servants. Then he told his servants that those who were invited to the wedding were not worthy so go into the highways and invite as many as you find to the wedding. On the special day the wedding hall was filled with both the bad and good of the kingdom but the king saw that one of the guests was not dressed for the wedding. He was confronted and the king ordered, "Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." "For," the king said, "Many are called but few are chosen."

The incident with the fig tree, and each of the stories is about heaven's expectations. These each serve as a warning to those who are not paying attention or feel free to do as they wish as if they did not have a God to whom they will answer when it is all said and done.

Jesus enacted His own coming in the case of the fig tree. He looked for fruit in a tree that looked fruit-bearing but all the tree delivered was false hope. Israel was in the midst of their period of greatest and most universal religious devotion at the time of Jesus' coming. It looked like this would be the moment when the Messiah would be accepted and honored by the people but there was no fruit (no turning to God and surrender to His will by the overwhelming consent of the population) and so heaven, disappointed as Jesus was, prepared to hold the people responsible for their intransience.

Jesus used the ministry of John the Baptist to mirror the stubbornness of the religious leaders back to themselves. They refused to take Jesus demonstration as a witness to the truth and instead challenged Him on the basis of , "who gave you the right?" In the case of John the Baptist, they refused to act on what they knew to be true. He was a prophet but they rejected his message too. The story

of the two sons contrasted the religious leaders and everyone who listened to them with the typical disciples of Jesus who came from the lower classes and the sinful classes like the tax collectors and the prostitutes. They were the people who had said "No," to God and who had then said "Yes," to Jesus.

The story of the landowner and the renters who harmed and killed his servants and then even his son was meant to tie the rejection of Jesus with the treatment that Israel had given to the prophets God had sent to His people in the past. They despised and rejected the prophets and so why is it surprising that when God sent His Son that they also rejected Him? The answer of the people to the question Jesus posed is telling. If the renters will not respect the landowner then he will certainly get rid of them and find renters who will pay the rent. Israel to be replaced as the people of God by the church.

The last story of the king who invited guests to the wedding party of his son continues this theme. The dignitaries of the kingdom have no time for the wedding and even insult and harm and kill the servants sent to remind them. The king reacted instantly and justly holding the guilty accountable for what they had done. Then he pursued his original intention and invited others, even the undeserving to the wedding. As a result the wedding hall was filled but one guest was dressed inappropriately and so he was dealt with for his rebelliousness for "Many are called but few are chosen."

God is. And He is actively seeking a people to be His own. In a time and place where there is every opportunity to live a life of spiritual devotion that honors Christ and seeks to live always in conformity to the will of God, what is God finding? Is He finding faith? Are the people who say "Yes" to Christ obedient after the father leaves the room? Are we giving God His due? Do we find ourselves too busy or too overcommitted to give the kingdom the time and respect it seeks? What are you doing about heaven's expectations of your response to the Savior and to His call in your life?