

Advent 3A
Matthew 11:2-11

As a petite, female pastor, I tend to startle people's expectations.
No matter how far we move forward in gender equality,

There are still raised eyebrows when I approach a hospital
information desk and request the clergy parking validation.

Funerals and weddings are always interesting.

Those are the moments when there are a lot of people
present who don't go to church often or at all,

Or who go to a very different church.

And so many times,

I receive comments like, "You don't look like
a pastor!"

Or, worse, "You're too cute to be a
pastor!"

I've asked my husband if he's ever been told he's "too cute to be
a pastor,"

And surprisingly, I know, his answer is "never."

Maybe my other male colleagues have been told they're too cute;
We'll have to ask them.

Have fun with that!

I am just sometimes not what people expect.

We all have expectations for the people we meet,
The situations we enter into.

We live in expectation.

And either our expectations are met,

Or we're blown away--

In a positive, or negative, way.

Our expectations might not be conscious to us.

We might not even recognize that they were there until they weren't met,

Or they were exceeded.

Then, in our reflection, we know--

We were expecting something different.

We live in expectation.

Expecting has this feeling all its own--

It's being on the precipice of another feeling,

You're just about to step off and fully enter the reality--

You almost know for sure,

But not quite.

There's still an element of uncertainty,

But expecting adds our own lens,

Our own assumptions to the mix.

We don't know. . .

But we think we know.

In our Gospel,

John the Baptist is in prison,

And reports are coming to him of what the Messiah is out there doing.

Yet John still doesn't seem sure if this is the one who is to come.
There's both present reality and expectation in John's
question.

John hears what is actually happening,
And still wonders in expectation.

Advent is a season that finds us both in our present reality,
And in expectation.

We sit in a doctor's waiting room, while purchasing the last of the
Christmas gifts on our phone, imagining the look of those who will
unwrap them Christmas morning.

We walk into the annual family holiday dinner, and we feel
the tears well up in memory of those we always spent
Christmas with, who are no longer here.

Christmas carols play on the hospital room TV as we
change into a gown for surgery.

We finalize the Christmas Eve dinner menu as we
head into a late work meeting.

We face the family member or friend
with whom we have a difficult
relationship, as we pray around the
table for peace and hope restored.

All that we haven't done yet,

All the ways we aren't ready for Christmas fill our heads and
our conversations.

Expectation fills our lives this season.

So when we gather in this space,

And hear the words this morning of holy expectation and anticipation,

We bring with us the loads of expectation that we have built up for ourselves,

We carry with us the burdens of expectation that we put on others.

We even haul in here our expectations of who God is and what the Messiah will be or will do for us.

We hear the words of Isaiah about a blossoming desert with streams running through it,

And weak hands and feeble knees made strong,

And Jesus fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy by opening up the eyes of the blind and the ears of the deaf,

Lifting the legs of the lame.

We hear the pronouncement of good news to the poor,

And the raising of the dead.

In the Scriptures,

God is saying, "Expect this!

"This is what I have come and will come to do.

Set your expectations on me."

We touch the water in the font,

Trace the sign of the cross on our foreheads,

Saying, "I am a child of God. You are a child of God."

And with those words and that cross,
 We call to mind that we live an expectant life!
That even though our reality is caught in sinfulness and death,
 Our expectation is forgiveness and life in Jesus Christ.
In baptism, God is saying, “Expect this!
 Expect that your life is mine, and not this world’s.
 Set your expectations on me.”

We come to this Table of grace,
 Expectant hands open to receive bread and wine,
 The body and blood of the one who died to save us.
And in tasting this gift,
 We live an expectant life!
 We become what we receive,
 One body in Jesus Christ.
In Holy Communion, God is saying, “Expect this!
 Expect that I am here,
 Present,
 Feeding you and forgiving you.
 Set your expectations on me.”

We come here and we remember where our greatest
expectations find their beginning.
 In the womb of Mary,
 Who was expecting,
 Mary, who certainly saw a different reality than the
 expected one,

from giving birth in a manger,
All the way to seeing her son die
on a cross.

What we live through on this earth won't meet the expectations
we hear in Scripture today,

Or what we believe our God will do.

We don't see it yet.

But we expect it.

Like John the Baptist,

We live imprisoned by the reality of this life,

By the questions that plague us when we do see
glimpses of hope--

“Are you the one who is to come?

Is it really you, Jesus?”

But we also live in expectation--

On that precipice waiting for what we know to be true,

What we believe will be true,

What God has promised will be true.

Expect Jesus this season, sisters and brothers.

He is the one who is to come,

And he is the one who is here now.