

Straight from the "Hart"

April 15, 2022 7 pm

Good Friday



Left to right: Jerry Weaver (Lay Reader 2). Pastor Chuck Williams, Mary Jo Bell (Music Leader and Soloist), Ann Martin (Lay Reader 1)

Welcome

Responsive Call to Worship (L - Pastor, C - Congregation)

L: If you desire to follow Christ, take up your cross and follow him.

C: If we want to save our life, we must invest it in the gospel and in others.

L: Losing your life in this way will in fact make your life full. So persistently run the race that is set before you.

C: We will focus on Christ.

L: He emptied himself of all but love, and bore our sins in his body on the cross -

C: - that we too might die to sin and live to God.

L: Remain standing as we sing...

Music *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*

Prayer In this holy time, as we remember the sacrifice of the cross. We offer the prayers of our hearts, that through them we may be transformed to be servants of justice, love and peace -- by living after the pattern of Christ, who was faithful in all

things, even death, and whose darkest hour gives us light and hope, and it is in his name that we pray. Amen.

Set 1 - Expectation

Bible Reading Acts 3:1-5

Reader 1: One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer—at three in the afternoon. Now a man who was lame from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts. When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, “Look at us!” So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them. (NIV)



Bible Reading John 13:1,3

Reader 2: It was before Passover, and Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and to return to the Father. He had always loved his followers in this world, and he loved them to the very end... Jesus knew that he had come from God and would go back to God. He also knew that the Father had given him complete power. (CEV)

Meditation Mark 9:31-34

Some people read the end of a novel so they know how it is going to end before it starts. Any of you do that? When we re-watch movies or television series, shocking twists of plot no longer surprise us. If it was a mystery, we already know who-done-it. When we aren't surprised.... and we are not so easily moved by the storyline.

Ever since God's creation of everything, he has been doing surprisingly new and wonderfully unexpected things. And while there is still more to go, there are many of his actions for which now we have been able to peek at the end of the stories. Unlike the people who originally lived them, we have become so familiar with God's history with us that are no longer caught off guard by sudden unexpected plot twists of God's interventions in human affairs. Tonight, my hope is to use a 4-point outline (which in the bulletin I have called sets)



which is loosely based on a talk by speaker Michael Jr. on a story in the book of Acts, and I've added holy week action, in hopes that we can at least recognize, if not perhaps recapture the original awe of God's astonishing actions.

The first step is to get back into the story and recapture the wonder of first-time experiences — to understand original expectations.

So the disabled man has been placed in front of the Temple to beg for charity. Capturing Peter and John's attention, the man expects material help to survive one more day. Expectations.

Last night, holy week Thursday, authorized with all power, and returning soon to heaven, Jesus gathered his disciples. The disciples fully expected to share in that authority -- now -- on earth. Expectations. It had been an expectation for a while now for them, and it was still an expectation as Jesus was ready to ascend to heaven. They asked, "Is it now when you are going to set up your kingdom?" as he is getting ready to go back to heaven. (See Acts 1:6)

Mark explains that Jesus ... *was teaching the disciples that the Son of Man would be handed over to people who would kill him. But three days later he would rise to life. The disciples did not understand what Jesus meant, and they were afraid to ask.* (CEV)

They were afraid to ask because they feared it would interfere with their expectations that God's kingdom was going to be immediately and fully fulfilled in their life. They wanted to share in ruling the known world now. We know this is what they expected because the text goes right on to say that - *Jesus asked them,* (after they had entered Jesus' house in Capernaum). *"What were you arguing about along the way?" They had been arguing about which one of them was the greatest...* (CEV) -- (in this kingdom that was going to be immediately set up.) Not just expectations, **Great Expectations.**

What were our expectations when we first began to experience Jesus in our life? Did we, and do we not sometimes still — also expect some sort of dominating rule that God would make others do what we think they should do? Do we not expect him to bring order and peace to our circumstances, to our homes, to our communities, to our nation, to the world? These heightened expectations may -- in some form and in their proper time -- be accurate. And they are expressed in our second hymn. Let's sing...

Music Response (vv 1,2,4,5) *Jesus Shall Reign*

Set 2 - Alteration

Bible Reading Acts 3:5-6

Reader 2: Peter and John looked at him. Then Peter said, "Look at us!" The man who could not walk looked at them. He thought he would get something from them. Peter said, "I have no money, but what I have I will give you! In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, get up and walk!" (NLV)



Bible Reading John 13:3-5, 15,17

Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him... I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

Meditation Mark 9:33-35

Sometimes, our expectations are right on, sometimes it is a matter of timing, and sometimes, they need to be altered. The lame man expected material help. Peter altered his expectations in ways that he, (or we (if we didn't already didn't know the end of the story), would have never, ever imagined. **Alterations.**

On that Thursday night, the disciples, filled grand and glorious expectations, are suddenly shocked into a new reality when their rabbi, whom they were convinced (rightly so) was the Messiah, the chosen king, the Son of God, got up from the meal and humbly washes their feet. And even moreso when we realize the text says that it is *because* of his authority, that he chose to do this. **Alterations.**

Mark says the disciples were silent when Jesus asked what they were you arguing about — but Jesus already knew -- about their misplaced ambition that led to problematic attitudes. Jesus attempts to correct them, first by foot-washing, and now also by saying . . . "Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all." (NIV) So not only alterations, **Great Alterations.**

The religious leaders saw something in Jesus that perhaps his disciples did not. Jesus so mismatched their expectations of God's anointed Messiah that they could

not even imagine thinking that Jesus could be him, and they outright rejected him.

This attempted correction doesn't phase us either because we've heard this particular type of plot twist in bible story after bible story after Bible story. But that doesn't eliminate the question: What about us? Are we so locked into our expectations of God that when God would want to alter our vision of who he is, and how he interacts with us, and what he expects of us in our current circumstances -- that we cannot be surprised, cannot recognize, and cannot be moved by it (and therefore reject any actions and words he sends our way? The disciples came really close to that themselves.

The disciple's rulership in the royal court of the golden crowned Jesus who would reign over the known world in all his glory -- that is the expectation they had -- who would want to alter that? The last thing they expected, the last thing they wanted - - was a wounded, suffering, crucified leader. Can we adjust our thinking to embrace and be thankful for this adjustment, this alteration, as it is expressed in this song?

Special Music *Via Dolorosa*

Key lyrics

Down the Via Dolorosa in Jerusalem that day
 The soldiers tried to clear the narrow street
 But the crowd pressed in to see
 The man condemned to die on Calvary
 He was bleeding from a beating,
 there were stripes upon His back
 And He wore a crown of thorns upon His head
 And He bore with every step
 The scorn of those who cried out for His death



Down the Via Dolorosa called the way of suffering
 Like a lamb came the Messiah, Christ the King
 But He chose to walk that road out of
 His love for you and me

Down the Via Dolorosa, all the way to Calvary
 The blood that would cleanse the souls of all men
 Made its way to the heart of Jerusalem

Down the Via Dolorosa called the way of suffering
 Like a lamb came the Messiah, Christ the King
 But He chose to walk that road out of His love for you and me
 Down the Via Dolorosa, all the way to Calvary

Set 3 - Revelation

Bible Reading Acts 3:6-8

Reader 1: Then Peter said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God. (NIV)



Bible Reading John 13:12-17

Reader 2: After Jesus had washed his disciples' feet and had put his outer garment back on, he sat down again. Then he said: Do you understand what I have done? You call me your teacher and Lord, and you should, because that is who I am. And if your Lord and teacher has washed your feet, you should do the same for each other. I have set the example, and you should do for each other exactly what I have done for you. I tell you for certain that servants are not greater than their master, and messengers are not greater than the one who sent them. You know these things, and God will bless you, if you do them. (CEV)

Meditation Mark 9:36-37

Expectations altered, now comes the revelation, the Aha! moment, when it dawns on us that what God has planned is so much different and in the long run, so much better for God's creation than we could have imagined.

So the man, filled with hope for a generous donation -- something that would get him through the next day -- receives something completely different and is filled with praise. He sees God in a new way and his future in a new light. **Revelation.**

The Son with all power serves his disciples and tells them that this example is the way to true blessing: to serve others as he has served them. The bulb doesn't seem to have quite dimly light up above their heads yet -- but eventually it does -- that they receive blessing — not by rule, but by service. This is the intended **Revelation.**

And after the disciples refuse to confess their pecking order argument, Jesus decides to give them a strong visual. He takes someone who had no standing, no

voice, no social importance in their society: *He took a little child whom he placed among them. Taking the child in his arms, he said to them, "Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not [only] welcome me but the one who sent me."* (NIV)

In the kingdom of God, importance is not based on pecking each other to death to find a higher place in the order, but rather by welcoming as treasured guests—not the just those who we think can do much for us, but to see everyone as valued and loved and important to God. That is not only a revelation, that is a **Great Revelation** in and society in any day... It is a great revelation.

And we do this for others, because the revelation is that God, in Jesus, did this for us too. What is humanity in the great scheme of the Universe, that God is even mindful of us? Yet he is more than mindful, while we were yet sinners, he gave his Son to die for us -- we did nothing, could never do enough, to earn or deserve it, yet he graciously gave himself anyway.... Let's sing about that.

Music Response (vv 1,2,5) *Alas! and Did My Savior Bleed*

Set 4 - Transformation

Bible Reading Acts 3:8-10

Reader 2: ... he jumped up and started walking. He went with Peter and John into the temple, walking and jumping and praising God.

Everyone saw him walking around and praising God. They knew that he was the beggar who had been lying beside the Beautiful Gate, and they were completely surprised. They could not imagine what had happened to the man. (CEV)

Bible Reading John 13:17, 34-35

Reader 1: Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them... "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (NIV)

Meditation

Mark 9:41-42, 1 Corinthians 10:31b-33, 1:23-24

We can deny grace by holding on to our initial expectations. We can block grace by refusing to be altered. We can reject grace by refusing to see the light.



Or, we can begin a great journey -- by letting go of our demands, opening ourselves to the possibility of change, and see God, others, and ourselves as God reveals himself and his life design for us.

There is one last set, because it is one thing to expect things, it is another thing to allow those expectations to alter our way of thinking, and it is yet another to see the altered path — and it is still yet another thing to begin living that alternate path. *This* — is what we call *transformation*. We have flashed images for the first three of those “sets”, but there is deliberately no image for this set — because the journey that has brought each of us to this place (or watching on line or reading this script) may be very different, and when we get up to walk out, or turn off the screen, or put down this script, the journey may still be very different of what God is trying to show each of us. Each of us may have a different new expectation that we need to visualize under God’s altering revelation.

The transformation of the no longer lame man may seem obvious to us. God has equipped him to be a responsible member of society. He can fend for himself without begging for his daily existence. Everyone saw him “differently” and with amazement.

But it is one thing to be happy and hop around in the Temple. What would his next days of life look like? How are his now strong ankles going to play out in the rest of his life? After a lifetime of begging, after that is all he has ever known -- Would a potential employer even want to take a chance on him? And if not, what then? Would his life *really* change? Jesus had asked another lame man laying by a pool to consider carefully if he truly wanted to be healed, because being healed means being and doing something very different than what he was used to.

It is one thing to expect to lead (lie the disciples did), another to be altered to serve and recognize that blessing comes through service, it is another to love others with the same kind of love that Christ loved us, and to do so sooo completely that others will *know* that you do it on the basis of that love.

It is one thing to know that pecking orders are irrelevant and that we are to accept those society usually sees as insignificant and we are supposed to see them as valued and important people. Jesus goes on to say that people are so important that anyone who supports his people will be rewarded...This is what he says:

Truly I tell you, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to the Messiah will certainly not lose their reward. and he goes on to warn us to take care that we don’t get in the way of someone’s spiritual journey too.

[However] *“If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them if a large millstone were hung around their neck and they were thrown into the sea....* (NIV) Strong warning.

This journey of transformation is only possible by the gracious work of Christ on the cross, and the fact that Jesus was willing to do this for us is why this Friday is called good. Paul acknowledges that it is hard for some to accept, and people may stumble over the message of Christ crucified — (because he and his message doesn't match our expectations, that we can't make alterations to make that message fit into our life, or we simply can't see the unique revelation of his message); or maybe some have simply become so familiar with his story that it just doesn't impact us anymore... but Paul forges ahead anyway, saying -- ²³ ... *we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles,* [to some] (NIV) ^{31b} [but then he goes on to say that while truth may get in the way of some people, we should not [be the ones who get in the way]: *{Whatever you do} always do it to honor God.* ³² *Do not cause anyone to stumble, Don't cause problems for ~~Jews or Greeks or~~ anyone else who belongs to God's church.* ³³ *I always try to please others instead of myself, not seeking my own good but the good of many, in the hope that many of them will be saved...* (CEV)

We've been around the church a long time, most of us. For us, there is nothing I've said tonight that is new or unexpected. It is all the same stuff isn't it -- we've heard it for years in one form or another.

And maybe our lives are perfectly lined up with God's expectations, alterations, and revelation — and there is no need to do anything differently - we just need to keep on doing what we are doing.

But for some of us, maybe there is a small area of our life that we wonder about, that it doesn't line up with what the Spirit is doing in our gut, head and / or heart — you know, that conscience that we have... pangs we feel, or used to feel. But we never quite managed to cut a new path, kept falling back to old patterns; and we've become so familiar and so accustomed and so comfortable with that *old* way, that we have come to expect -- that that old way is just fine.

Now, any attempts at altering that expectation no longer alters us, we no longer see fresh insights, and therefore, there is no opportunity for transforming growth in that one area of our life. Our spiritual ankles have re-weakened, our cultural ambitions are not moving from ruling to serving (from pride to humbleness), we hear about taking up our cross and we ignore it, using a variety of reasons... We

don't change our awareness of pecking orders and their association with value or lack of value — we just don't talk about it, or might even say the opposite of what we live because we've heard the stories and know what we are *supposed* to say - - I call those "Sunday School answers" . We "know" the answer, we say the answer, but do we really *know* it -- do we really live it?

This is Good Friday — so much has happened since yesterday when we followed the disciples as they entered into that room with hope filled expectations — wrong expectations, but we didn't know that, and they didn't know that. Now, as we see our King crucified, what does that do in this moment to our expectations, our alterations, our insights, our hopes? Imagine what it must have been like after the meal last night, then in the garden, seeing the arrest, our scattering into the night — the powers-that-be have won by domination yet again and we have run off cowering in fear of their wrath against us -- for allegedly choosing the "wrong" hero.

To not already know Sunday's story, to live in those moments before that event happened that changed everything — to witness the crucifixion without knowing the rest of the story — try carrying that with you into Sunday morning.

I'd be getting ahead of our timetable to talk about how defeated expectations are changed yet again on Sunday. You could, with tonight's outline, write that story yourself. But I do need to conclude tonight with one last application question. When I mentioned that "one area of your life" did anything pop into your head? If nothing, maybe something will come to you later as you ponder it later. If so, consider that that may be an area in which God is seeking you to discover or re-discover some insight and alter your expectations so that you can be transformed even *more* into his life and ways.

It is why we take a stand beneath our Savior's cross — and his values of love and acceptance and service and support. Values in him that he said would save the world from its darker self, and us from ours — because the nearer we are to the cross, the more easily we can put to death those parts of our life that need to be put to death, and in turn find the light of Jesus shining on us.

Prayer Let's pray. Lord, we know our nature. The hairs on our neck bristle when our expectations are turned. We want a predictable fulfillment, to deny there is a need for any alteration in our life, to see any need for new insights, because it means we may have to change, and for most of us, real change is hard, even small changes. But help us to take confidence in your love for us, to trust that you know what is in our best interest. Help us remain open and willing to allow you to work

into our lives new expectations, new adjustments, new insights, so that we may continue to be transformed more into Christ's image with ever increasing brightness and beauty shining through as we become more and more like your Son.

Help us to boldly take our stand, not on any earthly accomplishment or throne, but beneath the cross where you ultimately demonstrated your love and grace for us in unimaginable and unexpected ways. We pray this in the name Jesus who has done all of this for us. Amen.

Let's sing our closing hymn.

Music Response ***Beneath the Cross of Jesus***

Blessing

Now go - established in the rock solid love of God by [seeing, knowing, listening, speaking, and serving, living, sharing, and transforming], nurturing a growing relationship with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who leads our old lives to the cross, and through it delivers us to new and eternal life. Amen.

