

Sermon Pentecost 7 July 8, 2018

Barbara T. Groves

What are your expectations when you come to church? It is hard to answer that sometimes. We have preconceived notions each time we walk through that door and that is different for each of us. If you are on a committee that deals with property issues, the first thing you look at is the structure, how is that paint job holding up? How are new light bulbs going to change how we see the inside of the church? Did that doorknob get fixed OK.....If you are involved in the music ministry; your focus is on how the music sounds. Did we practice enough, do we have enough voices to pull of that hard piece.....If you are on the Altar Guild you may focus on how the set up for communion looks; are there enough wafers and wine? Did I do it right. Then there are the ushers and servers and coffee hour people and the ministers of the word and sacrament, it takes quite a few of us to do this each week. Even though our main consideration should be our time with God to listen and learn, the expectations are pretty well set by all of us. We expect to worship God together with others in an environment that is comfortable and well run.

Our Gospel today tells us a bit about expectations as well. Jesus had returned to his home town with his disciples. People in that community have turned out to hear the prophet they have heard so much about. Jesus began teaching in the temple and they were amazed. They had heard so much about his wisdom and his many acts of power. As he spoke folks recognized him as the carpenter's son who had made furniture or doorposts for them. Mary and Joseph's son from down the road. They did not expect this prophet to be so familiar. He grew up among them, how could he speak with such authority, does he have everyone out there fooled?

The time was so different from what we experience today. Even though his reputation had preceded him to this place, perhaps the personal connection had not been made yet. Perhaps they were not aware of the person that the famous prophet was until he was teaching in the temple. There was no local news service, no radio or TV, no internet with his picture showing up everywhere, no posters announcing big revivals. He was a surprise to them; and they were amazed but not convinced.

That questioning and lack of faith rendered Jesus powerless in that place. He was amazed by their lack of faith. He then went into other towns and villages to teach. Then he gathered his disciples-He sent them out to other towns and villages with a list of instructions.

Now how can we relate to this? We have expectations of Jesus just like the people in his home town did.

We have all heard the stories again and again. They become as familiar to us as the Jesus of his time was to them. How can this be? Do we believe? Does our worship seem enough, does our prayer seem enough, and does our work in his name seem enough. What; after all, are his expectations of us.

Let's take a look at the rest of the Gospel today. What is he expecting of his disciples? That should be a pretty good clue to the rest of us. He sent them out two by two, in other words they were not to do the work alone and neither are we. Our community is important. He gave them authority over unclean spirits. Are we in the same category? Do we believe we have power over unclean spirits in this day and age?

He ordered them (not suggested) to take nothing with them. Very basic dress and a staff that is it. He told them to find a house that would welcome them and stay there until their ministry is done in that place. If a place did not welcome them they were to shake dust of your feet against them and move on. So they proclaimed that all should repent; they cast out demons and cured many sick people.

What? What are we to do? Sometimes I wonder myself..... Lately I have been reading and listening to sermons preached by our presiding Bishop Michael Curry. His message is so very simple and clear and powerful; the message is Love. God's Love, the love of Jesus and his teaching. He asks the question how we can together grow more deeply with Jesus Christ at the center of our lives. Bishop Curry is encouraging us to all have a rule of life. He tells us to Turn, learn, pray, worship, bless, go and rest.

Turn your life every day in the direction of Jesus like a flower turning toward the sun.

Daily learn by reading scripture and spiritual materials that will build up the spirit.

Spend time every day in prayer; however you choose to do that.

Worship in community at least once a week with other followers of Gods teachings. Accept God's blessing, and open our lives to God and make a decision each day to use every opportunity we have to ask ourselves how we can be a blessing to others in all we do.

Then go...go into the world and touch the life of someone else with God's love. Then rest. The soul needs rest. Even God rested on the seventh day.

Now if we go into the world could we cast out demons and cure the sick? You know there is no rule against that. There is no place in our scripture that confined that to do the disciples only. There is no place that tells us there was a time limit on all that ministry in the world. Do we hear that in our world today? There are folks out there with healing ministry. I have met a few and they are amazing people. Their faith is palpable. But they also know that God does not always heal people in a way that we expect. His expectations for each of us are not always revealed to us. I remember a woman who was suffering in terrible pain from cancer that was ending her life. She was a devout person and the whole church she belonged to had a vigil and was praying for her to be healed. When she died several people were angry that God had not healed her. I pointed out the fact she had no pain at all for the last two weeks of her life. I call that a healing. She was not cured according to our expectations, but she was healed.

Again, it boils down to expectations. What do we expect from God and what can God expect from us. We need to go deeper each time we gather for worship. Get beyond the paint and doorknobs ... the familiar that steals our focus. We need to open up to The Love of God; hear the word of God with our hearts, minds, and souls. Maybe we can pick up a hint for the week ahead that will help us grow spiritually and make life a little better for us and those around us.

If you hear some of the presiding Bishop's preaching during the general convention you will be inspired to follow the rule of "turn, learn, pray, worship, bless, go and rest."