**Changing Expectations, Changing Lives**

**Narrative Lectionary Epiphany 6**

**February 12, 2017**

Luke 7: 18-35 Russell Mitchell-Walker

I am sure you have had the experience of something or someone not living up to your expectations. It may have been a trip, a visit with someone, a book or movie, or even a political leader. I think there is a lot of people on both sides of the border feeling like expectations of their political leader are not being lived up to or are different from what they thought. Here in Canada we have recently seen the Prime Minister backtrack on promises of [electoral reform](http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/ottawa/electoral-reform-protest-trudeau-1.3978774), being [challenged](http://news.nationalpost.com/news/canada/canadian-politics/john-ivison-trudeau-was-always-a-joke-to-the-right-he-should-worry-now-the-lefts-joined-in-the-laughter) on his commitment to reconciliation with indigenous peoples and there is concern whether he will stand up to the US President to uphold our values and protect our trade interests. [Some](http://ktla.com/2017/01/29/mccain-graham-lead-in-gop-criticism-of-trump-travel-ban/) in the US who support the President may be feeling he has gone too far with the travel ban. John the Baptist was feeling Jesus wasn’t living up to his expectations and all he proclaimed him to be.

John has been in communication with his disciples about what Jesus has been up to. He prepared the way for this man to come and John proclaimed he would separate the wheat from the chaff. He expected him to rout out the Romans and liberate the Israelites. He had heard that Jesus preached and proclaimed that he has come to preach good news to the poor, recovery of sight to the blind, release of the prisoners, and liberation of the oppressed. It is the release of the prisoners that John is probably remembering most acutely as he is reflecting on all of this in prison, because he upset King Herod. So John may be wondering, why wasn’t his cousin coming to set him free? What kind of Messiah is he? Is he the Messiah or is there another one to come? This is John’s question that he sends his disciples to ask Jesus.

Jesus does not answer John’s question directly but responds with inviting them to tell John what they see. The blind are healed, the lame walk, the deaf hear, the poor have good news. And he continues to challenge those after John’s disciples left, about what they were looking for in the wilderness and the greatness of John as a prophet. Jesus’ message and ways are different than an expected Messiah. He was not bringing violent revolution to overthrow the oppressive government and establishing God’s kingdom the way they thought. He was proclaiming God’s Kingdom had arrived with his coming and his action. The Messiah was seen to be a strong political and religious figure. The Empire still reigned, Herod was still in power. They were not seeing the changes they expected, but were they seeing the change that was happening?

Can we see that Jesus’ message is different? That while he is challenging the systems and structures, he is doing so in a non-violent way. Can we live in his way? Non-violent resistance is still rare and not well known as a movement of resistance. Too much resistance ends up violent, even if it is a select few in a protest, and sometimes planted by the opposite side. Authorities and the system do not know how to deal with non-violence. Indeed when movements become violent, then it is easy for governing authorities to crack down and respond with limiting freedoms and respond with like violence. When government responds with violence to a non-violent movement, it makes the government leaders look bad and the public often sides with the people, the movement. This is what happened in Selma Alabama when the community was protesting for black people to be able to vote. There was a march on [Selma](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Selma_to_Montgomery_marches) and the protesters were attacked on the bridge. Here is a clip of [John Lewis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Lewis_%28Georgia_politician%29#Civil_rights_activism) who worked and marched with [Martin Luther King Jr.](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin_Luther_King_Jr.) sharing his experience of the march, as they met the state troopers and what happened afterwards.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DRwnXUbJdfg>

Jesus in asking the crowd what they went to the wilderness to see, is challenging them whether they saw and recognized the prophet that John was. He wanted to challenge those who did not see it. Those whose expectations were limited by their narrow view and expectations of God. How much are we like that? Can we face our expectations of wanting a God who intervenes? What if we are the ones to intervene, in Jesus’ way? Are our expectations of God too low or too high? Are our expectations of God wrong? We may despair because God is inactive in the world, and we wonder where God is in the midst of the violence and despair we see. What if God is active in us? What if God is behind the [movement](https://thinkprogress.org/rev-barber-these-times-require-a-new-language-and-a-new-fusion-coalition-c741b9eb1b47#.o7x6t9am7) that is happening in the US to challenge the racism, xenophobia and homophobia of the Republican Administration? Is this how God acts and intervenes in our lives? I believe that God is alive and the Spirit moves through us to motivate us to live out God’s mission and ministry. What if we are the ones who have the power to heal, to support positive thinking and infuse healing energy into the universe? What if this is the power of prayer? We have been talking a lot in the Craft Study group about being in alignment with God, with the universe and when we have that alignment, then good things happen. God works for good in our lives through that alignment and our openness to what is before us and how we respond to what happens in our lives.

This also involves slowing down and taking time to be present to what is around us, to God in us. To experience God within. How much do we actually take time to sit in silence with God, to experience the stillness of God within? This is essential for our ministry that we are called to. We cannot do the hard work of justice, the hard work of being with others, if we do not take this time for ourselves with God. Without it we lose energy, we burn out. Prayer, meditation, contemplative prayer, centering prayer, there are many ways to this stillness, this presence. It is important that we take time for it, whatever form works for us.

Finally in the story, there is the odd and difficult passage about the children. Jesus has just finished building up John and proclaiming him a prophet, affirming those who had been baptised and challenging those who had not, when he asks “To what then will I compare the people of this generation?”. He responds with the following:

They are like children sitting in the market-place and calling to one another,
“We played the flute for you, and you did not dance;
   we wailed, and you did not weep.”

It seems an odd example and not very easy to understand. I believe it is referring to how children can feel ignored by each other and by adults. So Jesus is calling attention to those who have ignored the message of John as well as his message. This is a passage that is held up as one of seven examples of Jesus’ view of children in [Godly Play](http://www.godlyplay.org). Godly Play is a storytelling method for sharing the Bible with children that uses materials to tell the story. It is engaging and child centred and is based on a children’s spirituality that comes from Jesus’ child centeredness. The Faith Formation Committee here at Eastside, in examining the challenge of finding leaders for our small group of children here, has decided to use Godly Play for its program. We will share a Godly Play story in the theme time in worship, and then we need volunteers to be with the children for the response or work time, which is basically an opportunity to express themselves creatively following the story. They have a choice of mediums to work with or can choose to work with the materials of the story. No teaching is needed as the teaching will happen in worship. There will be a training on this program and what would be involved in supporting the children March 9. Please let me know if you are interested in offering support to our children. It is part of our ministry to support the children in our midst and value their importance in our community.

That was the message of Jesus here, to uphold the importance and wisdom of children in our midst, just as we need to uphold and notice the importance of John and Jesus’ ministry. We all have a ministry to offer. May we discern what ministry we are called to offer and how we might be God’s hands, feet, and heart in the world. May we take time to be quiet and still with God as we discern and be open to widening our expectations of how God is working in and through and with us in the world.