

## Letting go of expectations

Sunday, Feb. 25, 2018

2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Lent, Year B

The Episcopal Church of St. John the Baptist, Aptos, CA

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In our Lenten series, we've been learning some specific tools for how to be more emotionally healthy in our relationships with others, and this little exchange between Peter and Jesus in today's Gospel reading looks like an illustration of the need for one of the skills we learned on Wednesday night: clarify expectations.

The passage starts with Jesus very clearly laying out what their expectations should be of him as the Messiah – that he would “undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.”

But Peter rebukes him because what Jesus is saying directly contradicts the expectations Peter has about what the Messiah should do, expectations that were based in centuries of Jewish tradition. The Messiah was supposed to be a military leader who would overthrow any foreign powers exerting control over Israel (like the Romans during Jesus's time). The Messiah would then reign over Israel as king, restoring her to her former prominence as a state.

These expectations that Peter had of Jesus would probably not meet the four criteria for a “valid” expectation as presented by the Scazerros in our Lenten

study program. For an expectation to be valid, we learned on Wednesday night, it must be “conscious, realistic, spoken, and mutually agreed upon.”

Peter’s expectations about what the Messiah should do were probably conscious, since they were based in centuries of tradition. And as for realistic – well, it’s kind of hard to judge what is a realistic and unrealistic expectation when you’re talking about an expectation of how God is going to act in the world. Because “nothing is impossible with God,” theoretically any proposed action could be realistic.

But the two criteria that Peter’s expectations definitely don’t meet is that they were not spoken or agreed upon. The expectations of the Messiah were so ingrained in the tradition, so known to everyone in the culture, we never actually see them spelled out in the Gospel texts. There is an assumption that everyone hearing this story “just knows” that the Messiah is supposed to restore the kingdom of Israel. Peter probably thinks that Jesus, as a good Jewish boy, “should just know” what he’s supposed to do as the Messiah. But we never see him actually say to Jesus, “Hey, this is what we expect you to do,” and Jesus has never agreed to these unspoken expectations Peter has of him. And this story from the Gospels is a perfect illustration of how unspoken expectations lead to conflict – just as they do in our own relationships.

Peter is so attached to his expectations that he can’t hear what Jesus is trying to say to him. He brings a

preconceived notion to the exchange that blocks him from receiving new information. “Suffer and die? No! The Messiah can’t suffer and die! He’s supposed to lay the smack-down on the Romans!”

Jesus’s rebuke of Peter, that Peter is “setting [his] mind not on divine things but on human things,” is a reminder that human-generated expectations of God and what God can and should do can prevent us from hearing what God is actually saying to us about what God *will* do. As Pete Scazzero pointed out in our lesson on Wednesday, many of us have expectations of God that God never agreed to! The practice of pausing several times a day for silent meditation that those of us in the Lenten series are trying out this season is a great tool to help us work on dropping those expectations and opening ourselves to hear what God is saying to us now – even if it is difficult or unpleasant, as Jesus’s predictions of his death were to the disciples.

What expectations do you have of God? See if you can become conscious enough of those expectations to let them go, and open yourself to what God is actually doing, even if it’s something you didn’t expect.