

## **Expecting the Unexpected**

### **A Reflection for the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent, 2020**

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Today's readings include two dramatic stories with unexpected happenings. I'm calling this reflection, "Expecting the Unexpected". From Samuel comes the story of David's unexpected anointing as future king. No one in the story—neither Samuel, God's servant, nor Jesse, David's father, expected David to be the chosen one. He is the youngest, the least, a lowly shepherd out in the pasture. Samuel expected Eliab, the eldest son—tall, probably glowing with confidence—to be God's choice. Any of Jesse's seven sons would have been more expected than David, just a boy.

Then John reports the story of a nameless, blind beggar unexpectedly healed. And even more unexpected was the way he was healed. Jesus made mud of his own saliva and dirt from the ground, spread it over the man's eyes like an ointment, and then told him to go wash it off in the pool of Siloam. The man did so, and his blindness was healed.

Do you think David could have imagined that he would become a king? Do you think that blind man ever expected to be healed? When he woke up that morning, do you think he said, today I could be healed? Do you think he expected to be healed when Jesus and his disciples stopped beside his begging place, talking amongst themselves over him and using his blindness as an example in their discussion about sin? More likely, he expected nothing from them. Many

people probably passed him every day, completely ignoring him, pretending to not even see him.

Seeing and being seen are often unexpected. Many people are accustomed to being unseen, ignored as though they don't exist, reminding them that they are just one of the many unnamed, unfortunate among the masses: beggars, the poor, the homeless, the disabled—the poor homeless disabled beggar: all victims of extraordinary often unexpected circumstances but largely unseen.

Seen through the eyes of God is a different kind of being seen. Samuel was instructed not to choose on his own perception, on the basis of human standards and human interests. He was told to wait for God's choice. God who looks on the heart chose David—not because David was perfect, but because of what God saw in his open heart.

Similarly, Jesus didn't single this blind man out for a miracle to show off his special powers. He chose him in the moment to reveal God's works, to show God's larger purpose of sending light into the world. I imagine that Jesus saw not just his man's blindness, but also *his* open heart—his willingness, like David's, to follow God's instructions to see what unexpected turn of events God would reveal.

Something else unexpected about these two stories is their similarities. Although hundreds of years apart in time, both are set in a context of community where expectations dominate. It

was expected that elder came before younger. It was expected that blind at birth was blind for life, and a life of begging was often the result. The people of those times expected rules to be followed, laws to be obeyed, the expected to be accepted.

Jesus himself was unexpected. He was not the Messiah King expected by the Jews of his day. In an unexpected way, he said, "Look! See me. I am the light of the world. I bring sight to the blind—both actual vision *and* insight into God's works. Jesus' actions were unexpected. Mud as ointment? Walking on water? Feeding a crowd of 1000s from a basket of bread and fish? No one expected such miracles.

In our time, we have come to expect the unexpected. Blindness may be reversible. Everything from cataract surgery to stem-cell therapy does or may soon transform blindness from a permanent loss to a treatable condition. In our time, we have mostly done away with kings. They are no longer expected to be powerful warriors who overthrow oppressive dictators and autocrats. Mostly figureheads these days, kings, and queens, who remain, may play valued symbolic roles, but our expectations of them are mostly symbolic as well. Kingship did not turn out well for the Israelites.

Most of us are familiar with surprises—with accidents and unexpected illness; with windfalls and crash-and-burn; with cake and cavities. Few of us actually expect miracles. In my life, like yours probably, expectations have been met and the unexpected has blindsided me. My daughter experienced a terrible accident, one that could never have been expected. Her

rehabilitation from it, exceeded expectations, but still wasn't what I expected, and the benefits didn't last. Her disabilities are both visible and invisible to the outside world. I had to learn to see her abilities through realistic eyes and her disabilities through the eyes of compassion.

We are living today with extraordinary unexpected events. Is our only choice here and now to accept them? Ordered to stay at home? Closed borders? Businesses all but shut down? Churches closed? Connecting digitally through machines? Worshiping at a Facebook page. Sermons on YouTube? We must expect the unexpected. How can we accept such unexpected challenges?

Well I am here to remind you that we do not need 5G or Spectrum or androids or apples or even old-fashioned radios to connect with Jesus. This day, like every other day, is our opportunity to look to Jesus for how to live it; to see Jesus at work in our sick and frightened world; to be comforted, guided, and blessed on the inside and outside. Today is our opportunity to pray for all of us caught in the storm of this viral crisis. Today is our opportunity to do our part accepting the unexpected with eyes wide open to the light of Jesus all around us, with hearts fully open to the Holy Spirit's comfort and inspiration, and with hands freshly washed to care for our beloveds.

"Surely, we are not blind, are we?"

Amen.