

Expectations Lead to Blindness

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[Psalm 126](#)

[Mark 10:46-52](#)

Sermon delivered at Christ the Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Hamden, CT

Expectations are a powerful thing. We all have expectations. Expectations for our careers, for our children's lives. We learn how powerful expectations can be, how much they can shape how we see the world, when they are broken. *That* can be hard to bear.

Expectations so often can blind us to what is, actually, right in front of us. Maddy and I at first had expectations about how we were going to raise Simone. But COVID-19 destroyed all of those immediately. And we were crushed. It took many weeks for us to finally see the wonderful gift we had in Simone, despite the fact we weren't able to be with family, and that a million other things didn't go as planned.

It is no coincidence that Jesus provides sight to Bartimaeus in Mark's Gospel this morning. This story of seeing truly comes at a major turning point. Jesus, just after this, enters Jerusalem. There is a triumphant procession as the people of Jerusalem believe they are welcoming their Messiah, their new King.

But if Mark's Gospel is about anything it's about overturned expectations. Especially expectations about who this Messiah, this Christ, is. Messiah, as you might know, is a Hebrew word that means "anointed one." And in Ancient Israel, the very first kings were "anointed" by a prophet with oil. King Saul, and after him King David.

And as you also might know, the history of Israel is tragic. They experienced many times great suffering and humiliation at the hands of other, stronger, global powers. The expectations about this Messiah that was to come were pretty thoroughly fleshed out at the time Jesus came on the scene. Scribes and scrolls and schools and all that. And though this is in danger of oversimplifying—in essence, the expected Messiah was expected to settle the score: the bad, foreign guys are gonna get theirs, and the good, local guys will be restored.

And all throughout the Gospel of Mark Jesus is trying to control these misguided expectations. Also not coincidentally, it's the demons that Jesus casts out that recognize him, and try to spread misleading expectations. In Mark it's written:

And [Jesus] cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

And:

Whenever unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and shouted, "You are the Son of God!" But he sternly ordered them not to make him known. (3:11-12)

As Jesus was going through the towns and countryside as well, he was constantly telling people to be quiet:

"...see that you say nothing to anyone..." (1:44-45)

"he strictly ordered them that no one should know this... (5:43)

"He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there." (7:24)

"Then Jesus ordered them to tell no one..." (7:36)

"Then [Jesus] sent him away to his home, saying,

'Do not even go into the village.'" (8:26)

This is the impossible work of trying to control the expectations of a down-trodden people yearning for power and revenge. God's message to us in God's Son is certainly not revenge. It's not even a message of pure life and power. But Christ is a mysterious image of letting go, of how death and life are mingled. This begins to come out as Jesus talks with his disciples in Mark:

"[Jesus] asked them, 'but who do you say that I am?' Peter answered him, 'You are the messiah.' And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him." (8:29-30)

"They went on from there and passed through Galilee. He did not want anyone to know it; for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, 'The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being

killed, he will rise again.' But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him." (9:30-32)

Expectations, in all parts of life, in the bible and now, lead to blindness. My mother-in-law was sharing with me an anecdote about a parenting role model of hers that helps here. This woman's name, let's say, was Mrs. B. Mrs. B. had three kids and decided to take them out for ice cream. They each made their excited selections and Mrs. B. went in to make the order and pay. But it turned out that they were out of what her youngest daughter wanted. So, Mrs. B. picked a flavor she knew the girl would also love. But when she returned with an ice cream that was not her daughter's expectation, the little girl threw a fit. And speaking calmly to her daughter, Mrs. B. said, "I'm sorry: they don't have what you want. I got this for you. Do you want it?" And when the little girl angrily shook her head at the ice cream, Mrs. B. tossed it in the trash and away they went.

The people of ancient Israel, the people of 1st century Judea, are the same as the Church in the 21st century—we can be blinded by expectation. Expectations of who we think God is supposed to be—our private miracle worker—and how we expect our lives of faith to go—with full pews and accolades from our synod and communities.

But ironically, it is *blind* Bartimaeus who sees rightly. He hears that Jesus is walking by from the crowd and he makes his persistent announcement known, that Jesus is the Messiah, by calling him the Son of David. Now it's the disciples that are trying to shush him. But Jesus is ready to begin to reveal who the Messiah is, who Christ is, because they are on the threshold of Jerusalem and the betrayal to come. It is the witness of a sightless, poor person that sets it in motion.

Bartimaeus is alert to hope and sees who Jesus is without vision. Jesus calls the man to him, just as Jesus calls to each of us. Bartimaeus throws away his cloak, his only possession. He leaves behind his shell, his protection, his expectations, and comes to Jesus, empty. And Bartimaeus is given true sight. His only response, Mark writes, is to follow Jesus. And so, at the feet of Jesus ourselves, at the threshold between sight and blindness, between hope and giving up, mingling with both death and life, is where we find ourselves as a community in this era.

To follow Jesus means to tread a hard path. But I hope you will believe that we are indeed on it. It's a path you all already know: a road through broken expectations, through grief and humiliation, a road that asks us to cast aside our "cloaks," to serve others first.

But we also believe that this way we are on, as we follow Jesus, beyond all false expectations, **ultimately leads to life**—a Resurrection Life—that neither we nor even the very first disciples

could ever have expected. And so, I close with the words of the Psalmist today, words of joyfully shattered expectations:

*May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy.
Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing,
shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves.*

Amen.