



**December 16, 2007**

Preaching: Rev. Ronni Verboom

Matthew 11:2-11

## “Should we expect someone else?”

“Christmas is coming, the goose is getting fat! Please to put a penny in the old man’s hat....” It’s Advent! Christmas is coming! Do you have great expectations for Christmas this year?

What do you picture when you imagine a wonderful Christmas? Do you picture snow on the ground crunching underfoot as we approach homes twinkling with strings of holiday lights? Do you imagine families gathering in love and harmony to feast, open gifts and sing carols? Do you picture scrubbed tots “with their eyes all aglow” checking their stockings and obediently scurrying off to bed, snuggling under their quilts, falling asleep peacefully so they can awaken rested in the morning, ready to enjoy Santa’s heaping of toys and candy?

The Advent season of expectation stirs up the feeling that something indescribably glorious is going to happen: **SOON! THIS YEAR! THIS CHRISTMAS.**

The feeling reminds me of times when I go to look in my mailbox with a funny little sparkle inside me. There’s usually no reason to expect anything special. Usually the mail consists of advertisements, flyers or bills. But sometimes, I don’t know why, I get this little sparkle of hope that **TODAY, TODAY!!**, I am going to find something different—an unexpected letter or note saying, “I love you,” or “Thanks for being my friend.”

But—of course, the mail, almost always, turns out to be the usual, regular, ordinary mail.

My journey through Advent is sometimes like my trip to the mailbox. In Advent, I expect great things from God—for me, and for the whole world!

I get to hoping God will:

- cure my impatience this year
- help me to never do or say anything hurtful ever again to anyone
- help me learn to feel peaceful, even in trying times.

I get to hoping God will:

- help end poverty, disease, war, suffering
- help end racism, cruelty, prejudice
- bring to an end injustice and misery everywhere in the world.

Then----- Christmas comes.

And it is sometimes like opening my mailbox to find the regular, everyday mail.

- The ground is green and brown--- no snow until January.
- The holiday lights keep burning out and it's impossible to find the one bulb that's blacked them all out in the series wiring.
- Children are not just excited, but frenzied by the sugary foods and heaps of gifts. It's WAY past bedtime when they finally fall asleep.
- When gifts are opened and games are played, there are arguments and hurt feelings.
- It's possible that on Christmas day, the DAY ITSELF, I could impatiently snap at someone I love. I can end up feeling harried or sad instead of feeling peaceful, joyful, loving.
- And it is almost certain that on Christmas day we can open a paper and read about people starving somewhere in the world, a bomb exploding, a gunman shooting, innocent lives being lost.

We may find ourselves wondering----

***Hey, God, we were EXPECTING you! We were expecting you to come into our lives, to be born anew the way Jesus was born on that cold night long ago. Did you come? Have you? Are you truly with us? Or have we got to keep waiting?***

Friends, we are not the only ones to feel that way or ask those questions. The gospel of Matthew tells us that JOHN THE BAPTIST himself---

The one who acknowledged Jesus as God's Messiah—

The one who proclaimed the coming of God's kingdom---

The one who BAPTIZED JESUS-

This same man asked Jesus, "Are you the One? Are you the way God is coming to us HERE and NOW, or should we expect someone else?"

This may seem very strange to us. Wasn't it clear God was active, God was doing things, God was changing things? Jesus and his followers had been running all over dusty roads, traveling from town to town, extending God's miraculous love, mercy, and healing to the world.

Let's remember John's viewpoint. John the Baptist had expectations. He did not expect a Messiah like Jesus. Jesus was focused on restoring and healing God's creation. But John had expected One who would come with his winnowing fork in his hand, to gather in the harvest and burn the chaff with unquenchable fire. John may have expected a nationalistic Messiah who would restore Israel as a political power.

Jesus didn't fit those expectations. Jesus was full of surprises. He didn't tell John's followers straight out, "Of COURSE, I'm the One---- what do you MEAN, you should expect someone else??" He just said, "Look and listen, what do you see and hear?" They saw the healing and blessing in Jesus that was foretold by ancient prophets: "The blind receive sight, the lame walk, lepers are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised and good news is preached to the poor."

Friends, Christmas is not about what we expect. Christmas is not about what we EXPECT. Christmas is about what we DON'T expect. Think about it: John the Baptist's parents, Zechariah and Elizabeth, never expected to have a baby in their old age. Mary of Nazareth never expected to be the mother of EMMANUEL, God with us. Joseph never expected his young betrothed to be pregnant. Herod did not expect an infant to be a threat to his throne. The shepherds didn't expect to find the world's Savior in a dark stable in a poor village in a remote province of the Middle East.

John didn't expect Jesus to do and teach what he did. Through Jesus we come to see that SURPRISE is the NATURE OF GOD. That's who God is- One who is full of surprises: The meek shall inherit the earth. The first shall be last and the last first. Captains of industry, civic leaders, prominent world figures, righteous religious folks—all will enter God's kingdom behind children and the homeless. God is full of surprises!

The message today seems to be that we often look in the wrong places and listen for the wrong music. When God doesn't act in ways we expect, we wonder if God's there at all, if God ever really came to us, if God has remained with us, if God will always be there. We can lose heart and begin to think we need to look for someone else, or something else. We put our trust in money or institutions or nations or friends or family—who we expect to be our saviors.

Our expectations for Christmas and for our lives may need to be revised, as John the Baptist's were. We are called to be ready to find and meet God in ways we DON'T expect. John Killinger said God sometimes teaches and touches us "in the cake we didn't bake, the person we didn't hear from, the guest who didn't come, the job we lost, the course we flunked, the relationship we botched, in the illness that kept us in bed or the party we weren't invited to or the present we didn't receive. Who knows? Maybe from the perspective of the years we will think it was the best Christmas we ever had."

Sometimes, when I'm out at my mailbox collecting ordinary mail, a neighbor spots me and asks how I'm doing. She puts her hand on my arm and gives it a squeeze. When I get inside the house the phone rings and a colleague has called to tell me he appreciated my involvement on a project we just completed. Dinner is on the way to being ready because my son has spent a half hour in the kitchen concocting something that smells delicious.

You see, the messages I was expecting aren't always in the mailbox—not THIS time—but they are all around me.

These should be our expectations for Christmas: THINGS WE DON'T EXPECT--  
- that speak to us of God's gift of life and love. We don't need to expect anyone else. That's what Christmas is all about. God is coming; God has come; and God will come yet again and again, to us, his waiting people. Praise God from whom all blessings flow!

(Pass out needlework sets discovered over a year ago during an all-church cleanup. This will be something the people "didn't expect" to receive—is there a message God may be bringing to you through this unexpected gift?)