

Luke 13:18-21
“Beyond Expectations”

I’ve been thinking about some unexpected heroes in the Bible.

There are those who initially try to get out of serving God because they feel they are not good enough—such as Moses, Isaiah, and Jeremiah—or a guy like Jonah, who tries to get out of serving God altogether by running away. But God uses them all for sacred purposes. Come to think of it, Jonah is never all that heroic...but God uses him anyway.

There are those from humble origins that God chooses for heavenly work. Like David—a skinny shepherd boy with a sling shot who becomes king. Like Mary—a young peasant woman who becomes the mother of the Messiah.

Then there’s the Apostle Paul, who starts out “breathing threats and murder against” Christians before he himself becomes a follower of Christ—becomes the first, and perhaps the greatest, Christian theologian.

Every one of these unexpected heroes has me thinking about how God regularly operates in ways that go beyond worldly expectations. Paul puts it this way:

²⁵ For God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God’s weakness is stronger than human strength.²⁶ Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. ²⁷ But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; ²⁸ God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, ²⁹ so that no one might boast in the presence of God.

Which has me thinking some more.

There is also a certain unexpectedness connected with Jesus of Nazareth being Jesus the Christ. Birth in a lowly stable and a criminal’s death on a cross are not the kind of circumstances that that you’d expect to happen to the very Son of God. Nevertheless, beyond expectations, God in Christ chooses to redeem us by way of experiencing our human condition.

I share all this because for the first time it has occurred to me that the unexpectedness connected with Jesus of Nazareth being Jesus the Christ corresponds to his parables of the mustard seed and the yeast. More specifically,

- it occurs to me that these parables can be understood in terms of Jesus being the mustard seed, Jesus being the yeast.

- it occurs to me that there is a divine measure of Christ's resurrection spirit and power within us which is:
 - like a tiny seed that grows not just into a bush but a tree, the size of which surprises the confines of a garden
 - like a small portion of yeast that can leaven enough bread to feed not just one, but several families
- It occurs to me that beyond all worldly expectations, this divine measure of Christ's resurrection spirit and power can grow within us such that we then
 - grow in the ways of the reign of God,
 - grow in our capacity to participate in God's will being done on earth as it is in heaven,
 - can grow in our readiness to love God with every fiber of our being and our neighbors as ourselves.

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Do you have a sense that we're living through days fraught with low expectations? Or perhaps more distressing still, that we're living through days of crash and burn expectations.

If you feel that way—even if you don't feel that way, but especially if you do—I truly believe that these are days that call for us to make a commitment with all our heart and mind, with all our soul and strength—a commitment to receive the seed and yeast of Christ's resurrection spirit and power—receive it and let it grow within us.

This is not a commitment to slough off onto others. With the seed and yeast of Christ's resurrection spirit and power growing in us:

- We are the ones who are called to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God.
- We are the ones who are called to be faithful, hopeful, and loving.
- We are the ones who are called to be trustworthy messengers of good news and ambassadors of reconciliation
- Beyond our own expectations, we are the ones that God expects
 - to go out into the world in peace
 - having courage
 - holding onto what is good
 - returning no one evil for evil
 - strengthening the fainthearted and brokenhearted
 - supporting the weak, and helping the suffering
 - honoring all people
 - loving and serving Christ
 - rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit

We may feel that we are not equal to this task. But, as Nadia Bolz-Weber reminds us: “Never once did Jesus scan the room for the best example of holy living and send that person out to tell others about him. He always sent out stumblers and sinners.”

In other words, Jesus worked with an assortment of followers whom you would least expect to be equal to the task of reliable discipleship—and he is still willing to work even with the likes of followers like you and me. In fact, Jesus fully expects to work in and with and through the likes of you and me.

The seed and yeast of Christ’s resurrection spirit and power are in us. We need to let them grow beyond our own human expectations so that we then grow according to God’s holy expectations.

We need to let the seed and yeast of Christ’s resurrection spirit and power *inform us*:

- inform the way we look at the world
- inform the way we act in the world
- inform the way we discern what is, and is not, true to God’s will being done on earth as it is in heaven
- inform our decisions with respect to
 - our political points of view
 - how we make and spend our money
 - the company we keep
 - the neighborhoods where we live
 - how we interact with people who aren’t like us
 - how FCC will be a church
 - heading into a year of transition
 - heading into a mid-21st century context that is approaching faster than you might expect.

Through it all, it’s a matter of meeting God’s expectations.

- It’s not what you and I need so much as what God expects us to be and do
- It’s not what the church needs so much as what God expects the church to be and do
- Because, remember, the seed and yeast of Christ’s resurrection spirit and power are in us.
 - In us, ready and willing to work with and through us
 - In us, ready to equip us to meet God’s expectations
- So get ready to grow—**no matter what**, because the seed and yeast of Christ’s resurrection spirit and power will see FCC through, beyond even the greatest expectations.