

“REVISED EXPECTATIONS”

John 20:19-22

Sermon by Guest Speaker,
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For these moments that we share together, in the beautiful sacred space, I want you to think with me on the topic, “Revive Expectations.”

First Baptist, I must confess that it is one of my secret joys to listen to old music from the 60’s and the 70’s, and the 80’s. You are probably looking at me and saying, “Well, aren’t you just twenty something?” It is one of my delights to listen to that kind of music. Yes, in case you’re wondering, I’ve been endowed with the blessing and the curse of having what is called, an “old soul.”

It is a blessing because many have shared that I have wisdom beyond my years. It is a blessing because I can sit down and have meaningful conversations with those representatives of generations past. It is a blessing because I have learned to just be appreciative of small things in life. But it’s also a curse because all of my friends, my colleagues, and my associates, make fun of me. They just want to call me an old man. They call me things like grandpa Jo, or uncle Jo. They say “What do you have for us today, uncle Jo, some exciting stories?”

Yes, it’s a blessing and a curse of having an ‘old soul’. But since I have this old soul, there’s one song of the 60’s that I like by Motown group, called Martha and the Vandellas, entitled, “Nowhere to Run.” In this Pop song, there’s one line that grabs me the most, it really hooks me every time. It’s simple. It says, “there’s nowhere to run, there’s nowhere to hide.”

And without going into any further contextual detail of this song, I started thinking. I started pondering, in this season of Resurrection, of this Second Sunday of Easter time, I thought if there’s one line that encapsulates how the disciples were feeling, at this moment in John 20, it’s the line that says, “there’s nowhere to run, there’s nowhere to hide.”

These disciples, they were sorrowful, they were grieving, they were fearful, and they were frightened. They were anxious. They were even maybe feeling misunderstood. They were on the edge, and they had nowhere to run. They had nowhere to hide. But, Oh, my friends, they tried. They tried, because if we read verse 19, we find that they were together – but not just that they were together, they were assembled behind locked doors, because maybe this was a good attempt at steeling away.

Maybe this was a good attempt to get out of all the limelight of that day. Lest I forget, they said, “Maybe if we come together we can share each other’s pain, but let’s lock the doors. We’re scarred. There’s nowhere to run, and nowhere to hide,” because fear was the only expectation of the day.

For the followers of Jesus Christ, fear was the only expectation, because they had experienced the horror of crucifixion. In fact, they had already begun to retreat, when things got hot. The gospel narrative, in John 19, that Mary, the mother of James, and other women, were there near the cross. But the other disciples watched, from afar off. There was nowhere to run, and there was nowhere to hide.

What else could they expect? If I was identified with this ‘Jesus fellow’, maybe I’d meet the same fate.

Simon Peter, one of his closest companions, while Jesus was on trial, while Jesus was being questioned, Peter wasn't too far away. In fact, John records that he was by the fire warming himself. There was a young lady came by and said, "Hey, aren't you one of *them*?" And he said No! No! I don't know the guy. "Hey, aren't you one of the guys that followed Him?" He said, 'hey, (it's late at night), I told you, I don't know the man.'" "You just look familiar."

Three times. Peter said, "I don't know the man." Then he heard the cock crow, and he remembered the words that Jesus had spoken to him. Saying that, "Before the cock crows three times, you will have denied me."

And that's just before Crucifixion. But now, they had experienced the agony, the scrutiny of 'Crucifixion', and now they are afraid. They have nowhere to run, and they have nowhere to hide. Their friend, their confidant, their leader, their teacher, had been unjustly killed by State sanctioned violence.

He was unarmed. They said, "Wow! If they could kill Him, what can they do to us?" I know Peter was thinking that. I like Peter. Peter was quick to ask questions, but Peter also kept the sword on him. He was also ready for battle, at all times.

I can imagine them thinking, if they can do that to Him, and he wasn't even armed. All he did was a transformative love, and they killed Him. Now his disciples are saying- "There's nowhere to run, there's nowhere to hide."

I imagine it's like in our 21st Century American context. People are under threat, under persecution. They are under threat as being looked at, not in the image of God, but looked at as thugs, and rapists, and criminals. They are under threat of having a cell phone, and it being mistaken for a gun, and being killed. These people have nowhere to run, and nowhere to hide. And this is what the disciples are feeling. The disciples had no expectations, outside of fear, because fear crowds our expectations, and our brightest hopes.

But, I don't want to be too hard on the disciples. Maybe the disciples had selective hearing. They walked with Jesus, they roamed with Jesus, they prayed with Jesus, they fasted with Jesus. Maybe they only remembered the words of persecution and condemnation, and trouble. They must have forgotten that in John's narrative that Jesus said, "In a little while, I'll be with you. I'm going away, but I'm coming back.

They must have forgotten that Jesus said, "My Peace I leave with you. Not as the world gives you." But they must have forgotten that. They must have forgotten that Jesus said in those days, you will experience trouble, but don't faint. Take heed that I have overcome the world.

Maybe they only heard the words of 'trouble'. Maybe those were the only words that stuck, instead of the words of peace, the words of power, instead of the words of joy, even New Life. That New Life thing is kind of confusing. The time Jesus talked about New Life, (or being raised again from the dead)- the disciples scratching their head. "Hey, what is this guy talking about?"

Maybe those words didn't stick. Especially now. All they could remember were the words of fear, and trouble, and destruction, because fear will only have you believe the worst and see the bad in people, and in situations. Fear will certainly have you on the side of pessimism, rather than optimism.

Fear will have you clinging to doubt and despair rather than desires. Your belief in hope, in goodness. That's what fear will do. Matter of fact, one of my cherished professors, Bishop, Will Willowmier, says that fear cheats us out of God, and all He intends us to be. Fear will place limitations on all your expectations.

You say, “Well, Preacher, what do you mean?” While it was still dark, a woman went to the tomb, and she saw it was empty. And she said, “Oh no! They have taken our Lord!” So, she ran to the house with Peter and the other disciples. “They have taken our Lord, and I don’t know where they have put him.”

So, the disciples take off running and the other disciple reaches the tomb, looks in, and sees the linen laying there. Peter, with his bold self, goes in the tomb and looks in, then he saw and believed. Not necessarily that he believed in the resurrection, but he believed the tomb was empty. There is a difference. Just because they believed there was an empty tomb doesn’t mean they believed in the resurrection from the dead, because the narrator says in John says, “For they did not yet understand the scripture that Jesus would rise from the dead.”

Then the Bible says, “Then he saw and believed.” Not necessarily did he believe in the resurrection. He believed that the tomb was empty. Not necessarily did they believe in the resurrection from the dead, but they believed, as John says parenthetically. And they believed the scripture that Jesus would arise from the dead.

So, they go back home (Peter and the beloved disciples) and said, “What was Mary talking about? What is going on with that woman? Now we have to devise a plan. Man, it’s really scary now because the body of Jesus, the body of our Lord is gone. Who took it? Who stole it?”

Now they’re back in the house, but Mary is left alone at the tomb. She’s weeping. She’s very sad, and she looks and she sees Jesus, but she doesn’t recognize that it’s Jesus, and she supposes him to be a gardener. And He says, “Woman, why are you crying? Mary was probably frustrated and fearful, and she says, “Sir, if you now where they took Him, just tell me, so we can go.

And Jesus says, “Mary!” And she was rejoicing and overjoyed, and she says, “Rabbani! which means teacher. Your back, your back. I knew it all along! You did just what you said! And He says, “Don’t cling to me, for I am ascending. Go tell my brothers that I am ascending to my God, and your God. My father, and your father.

Isn’t that amazing that the resurrection makes room for us to come into God’s family – my God and your God, my Father and your Father! Do you remember that in John 14 it says that in my Father’s house there are many rooms. And now with Jesus’ declaration to Mary, the rooms have been opened.

He tells Mary to go tell. I imagine that Mary runs back to the house and thinks, Wow! I don’t know how it’s going to go this time. They will probably think I have a couple of loose screws, but I’m gonna tell ‘em, because the Lord has told me. That’s the beautiful thing about the power of the resurrection. The resurrection gives validation to your voice. The resurrection gives validation to your witness. You can now speak words, you can now sing words. You can now pray words of God’s story of God’s resurrection, of God’s suffering, of God’s death.

He says, God tell ‘em. Mary goes with joy in her heart, a joy that didn’t quite make sense, but she goes and says, “I’ve seen the Lord!” They are probably sitting at the table like ‘Oh Mary, stop! We’ve had enough. We have to find out where the body of Jesus is. Will you please stop with all this, I’ve seen the Lord nonsense. We were at the tomb and He wasn’t there. “I’ve seen the Lord!” “Mary please give it a rest! Take a break!”

Isn’t it interesting that they didn’t believe the Word? That bothers me. I know that in times of antiquity, with Jewish customs, women weren’t believed as having strong words or testamentary, but this wasn’t

any ordinary women. This was Mary Magdalene, who had washed the feet of Jesus with her tears. They didn't believe her that Mary had been with Jesus?

I'm glad they didn't believe her, and that's the beautiful thing about this whole story is that you cannot stop a woman with a word. That's why I've learned to not argue with a woman. I've learned to just listen and receive. You cannot stop a woman with a word, especially the Word of God!

But still, the disciples had no expectation, but fear. That's why they were behind locked doors. Closed!

And I imagine they remembered the words of Jesus in John 16 where Jesus said there is a day coming where you will scatter to your homes and I'll be all alone. I imagine they remembered those words when they were behind locked doors. But here's the trick. They were no longer scattered – they are gathered.

Now they're gathered behind locked doors because of the resurrection. I don't think they know, but in Jesus' personal prayer time, and in intercession, in John 17, Jesus prays to the Father and says, "Father, protect them who you have given me. Father protect those by your Name. Sanctify them with your truth, and as you have sent me, I will send them.

The disciples didn't realize that they were now gathered, even though their expectations were fear, they were still gathered in faith. How do you know that? Because they were followers of Jesus Christ. That's why Jesus could appear and say, "Peace be with you."

I bet this was really scary. I don't know how many of them believed in ghosts back then, but Jesus does this beautiful thing. Here's my hands. Here's my side. And now they were overjoyed because they had seen the Lord. Now they had a new vision outside of fear. Now their expectations have been revised, because the resurrection sets things in place for revision – renewed vision. Now they can have a vision of peace. They can have a vision of Christological clarity, because they have seen the Lord.

And the Lord says to them again. "Peace be unto you. As the Father as sent me, now I send you." I know your fearful, I know the doors are locked, but you have to go beyond the bounds. You have to go beyond the confines of normalcy. You have to get out of comfort and step out courageously, because I'm sending you.

I think that's a word for First Baptist Church Asheville. Because of the resurrection, you can do things that you haven't otherwise done. You can step out of here and do transformational ministry that transforms the City of Asheville because of the resurrection, because we gather in the name of Jesus, we can experience a peace – a radical peace that reorients our vision towards Christ, because the resurrection shows us that it's not about God moving out, but rather, about God moving in.

There's a hymn writer that pens these words that I absolutely love – You ask me how I know He lives, He lives within my heart. And now we can live in the resurrection in the world as Christians who have no fear, whose expectations are revised because now we understand that fear neither has the first word, nor the final say.

Jesus then breaths on them, and He says, 'receive the Holy Spirit'. Wonder what happens when God breaths on us? Well, I guess we'll have to find out. But yet, I have a better question.

What do you expect?