

1 Sermon, October 21, 2012

Texts: John 14:8-14, Philippians 4:4-9

Title: "Beyond All Expectation"

1. Jesus expects beyond belief
2. Paul Webster
3. What does Jesus expect here?

Dr. Wayne Dyer, a motivational speaker who can be seen on TV, said: "When you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change."

It's true. When you change the way you look at things, things do change.

Today's sermon title, "Think Greater – Beyond All Expectation," is really about changing our expectations, so you look at things differently, and the things you look at change.

1. Jesus expects beyond belief

If we look at the gospels, it's clear that Jesus had much greater expectations than the people around him.

Jesus would always "Think Greater."

Our gospel reading has Jesus talking about his disciples doing greater things than *him*. That's *really* setting high expectations. But there are so many verses in the Gospels where it is clear that Jesus was expecting more from others:

In Luke 5, Simon Peter and his friends had been fishing all night, and caught nothing. Jesus asked them to put out into deep water and let down their nets. They caught so many fish their nets began to break.

In Luke 7, a woman came to the house of Simon the leper and kissed his feet and washed them with her tears, and wiped his feet with her hair. Then Jesus turned to her and said, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace." She was not expecting that Jesus would praise her and proclaim her salvation. Jesus expected something from her; more than she did herself.

In Luke 9, Jesus set high expectations for sacrificial love:

"If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it." Luke 9:23, 24, NRSV.

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Jesus expected his followers to deny themselves and choose a heavy burden. In doing so, they would gain so much.

In Luke 18 an important, wealthy man came to Jesus and asked what to do gain eternal life. It's the same question that led to Jesus telling the Parable of the good Samaritan in Chapter 10. Again Jesus talked about the Ten Commandments. But instead of telling the story of unconditional love that is the Good Samaritan parable, Jesus said:

"There is still one thing lacking. Sell all that you own and distribute the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." Luke 18:20-22, NRSV.

Jesus expected something more of each person he met. What he expected was not the same for everyone, but it was a higher expectation than these people had of themselves.

2. Paul Webster

When Paul Webster went to Africa 17 years ago, the Lunda people had low expectations. They expected a life span of about 35 years, hunger, a 50% infant mortality rate, and being forgotten by the central government and business. Many of the tribe had red hair, which was a sign that they were lacking certain basic nutrients.

Even though they lived in area with rich soil and good climate, the people did not know how to use it. They were essentially still a hunter-gatherer society, although they did plant and harvest cassava, a starchy root crop.

Paul Webster expected something greater. He had a vision for a healthy populace who had learned how to care for themselves, and so he set about introducing new crops and foods.

When Paul was trying to introduce dairy goats and milking, he demonstrated how to milk a goat. But when he offered the fresh milk to his listeners, they were afraid to taste it. So Paul drank some, and some brave souls decided they would try it.

One man said, "This tastes like milk."

Paul said, "It is milk."

The man said, "No. Milk is powder that you get from missionaries and mix with water."

Paul worked with tribal leaders, church leaders and introduced foods and methods farmers in the US would have used 100 years ago. Soon the people were eating diets supplemented by eggs, and meat from rabbits and pigs. They learned to eat swiss chard and other vegetables. Now nobody has red hair anymore.

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Local people are now exporting food to other parts of Zambia — things like oil pressed from sunflower seeds, and eggs.

They have become so prosperous that cell phone companies have installed towers in their area.

So much has happened because of the higher expectation that Paul Webster brought to the Lunda people around Mujila Falls.

3. What does Jesus expect here?

What if we were able to step outside of our usual expectations and look at our own community in the same way that Paul Webster looked at the Lunda People?

What if we were to change the way we looked at things?

I think we would see a people that are *spiritually* undernourished. We would see underdeveloped faith and disjointed relationships.

Young people believe that dating is about sex. If you think about it, that's what's been taught on TV for the last 20 years. In fact, one of the things that campus ministers are doing these days is teaching students how to date. College chaplains are teaching how to sit down to a meal with another person and have a conversation — a real conversation about values and hopes and dreams, about families and experiences.

Another thing that we might see here, if we were to look with missionary eyes is the way people treat those in authority. Think about how people treat the police. They complain that the police aren't doing their job in this way or that way. Or they will complain that the police are doing too much and interfering with people's lives.

But do people go to the police and say, "how can I work with you to make our community safer?"

In the last seven years, I've heard many complaints about mayors. Yet I think each mayor was trying to do his or her best, and probably often felt alone and abused.

Another sign of spiritual poverty is the way many people feel a sense of entitlement. It's been a big subject in the presidential campaign. I've known people on the reservation and in the inner city who felt that they should be taken care of. But a sense of entitlement is felt not just by people on welfare. College professors can have a sense of entitlement — thinking that their title commands privileges.

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CEOs of multinational corporations can have a sense of entitlement – thinking they *deserve* multi-million dollar salaries. Pastors, too, can have a sense of entitlement.

Any time one person feels that their rights are more important than someone else's, there is a spiritual problem. It's a problem that cuts across divisions of race and class.

If we were to think greater, one thing we might do here is teach *respect* for others as a human beings.

That applies to dating – to *respect* the person you date, to treat them well, to want to get to know their souls – that is the goal. Why would you want a relationship with someone who don't respect?

That applies to how we treat people in authority. To respect people in authority, we do not need to agree with them. But we can try to find ways to work together rather than always insisting on our own way. We need patience in learning to find solutions to complex problems.

That applies to our own attitude of entitlement. There are things we deserve, but the list may be shorter than we sometimes think. I think we do deserve clean air and water. We do deserve respect. But do we deserve quality health care, and who determines the quality – and who determines the quantity? Do we deserve to go to church if we contribute little to the cause in either money or effort? Does everyone who wants deserve to have children or be married?

We can get into a real mess if we try to figure out who deserves what. But if we start out assuming that everyone deserves respect, the rest of it can be worked out a little better.

I invite you to "think greater" about the spiritual situation in our community. The Apostle Paul told us to think greater about spiritual things when he said:

Finally, my friends, keep your minds on whatever is true, pure, right, holy, friendly, and proper. Don't ever stop thinking about what is truly worthwhile and worthy of praise.

To paraphrase Dr. Wayne Dyer, when we "think greater" about things, things will change.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

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Always be glad because of the Lord! I will say it again: Be glad. Always be gentle with others. The Lord will soon be here. Don't worry about anything, but pray about everything. With thankful hearts offer up your prayers and requests to God. Then, because you belong to Christ Jesus, God will bless you with peace that no one can completely understand. And this peace will control the way you think and feel.

Finally, my friends, keep your minds on whatever is true, pure, right, holy, friendly, and proper. Don't ever stop thinking about what is truly worthwhile and worthy of praise. You know the teachings I gave you, and you know what you heard me say and saw me do. So follow my example. And God, who gives peace, will be with you. **Philippians 4:4-9** (CEV)

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you. **Philippians 4:4-9** (NIV)

Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father. That is all we need."

Jesus replied: "Philip, I have been with you for a long time. Don't you know who I am? If you have seen me, you have seen the Father. How can you ask me to show you the Father? Don't you believe that I am one with the Father and that the Father is one with me? What I say isn't said on my own. The Father who lives in me does these things.

Have faith in me when I say that the Father is one with me and that I am one with the Father. Or else have faith in me simply because of the things I do. I tell you for certain that if you have faith in me, you will do the same things that I am doing. You will do even greater things, now that I am going back to the Father.

Ask me, and I will do whatever you ask. This way the Son will bring honor to the Father. I will do whatever you ask me to do. **John 14:8-14** (CEV)