

# Trading Expectations

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November 27, 2022. This Advent we reflect on expectations. The people of God were waiting for something that looked like swords to bring the justice they craved to the world, but Isaiah told them that God promised swords turned into plowshares. And today we expect, or at least wish, that God would come with practical, physical power and right the wrongs of the world. But even Jesus doesn't know the day or the hour when the kin-dom of God will come to pass, and we don't know what it might look like.

Readings: [Isaiah 2:1-5](#), [Matthew 24:36-44](#)

\*\*\* Transcript \*\*\*

Advent is a season of waiting, hoping, and expecting. This Advent, we join our Conference in reflecting on expectations — Great Expectations. When you hear the word “expectations” what comes to mind? I asked some friends and colleagues what they thought, and I got a lot of different perspectives as you might imagine.

One person said they define expectations as “waiting for something with preconceived ideas of when or how or what it should be — either good or bad.” Some of you may have heard the phrase, “Expectations are premeditated resentments,” a common saying in twelve-step groups, which warns against having unrealistic expectations of others that will inevitably fail. And it's even more problematic if you don't let the other person know what your expectations of them are.

One of my friends changed this to say that expectations are “resentments under construction,” which makes me imagine each expectation stacked, like bricks one on top of another, creating a wall of full-blown resentment that will likely require much more time to take down than it did to build.

One friend shared the worry that she'll be judged and not able to meet the expectations others have of her. And it's not just other people's expectations. The pressure of the expectations we place on ourselves can bind and crush us under a weight of disappointment and shame.

And one person, when asked about expectations, simply replied, “Disaster,” while another said that in their experience expectations lead to misery and suffering. That's not what we want! Having no expectations, they feel, means having no attachments to what will or should happen — and they find it freeing. One of my friends said that in defense against all of these challenges, they try to keep their expectations low sometimes, and they often end up pleasantly surprised.

So let's face it: things don't always happen when and how we want them to happen. And we don't always achieve what we want to achieve. And this time of year can be really fertile ground for expectations that, as my friend suggested, can lead to disaster — or at least a whole lot of pressure and stress. Perfect cookies, and other baked goods. (I failed this test already when I burned half the Chex Mix I made this week.) Beautiful decorations on a full, even, pine tree. (Not sure how that's going to work out this year since we have a rambunctious kitten who is just a year old. She hasn't seen a tree yet.) Peaceful, joy-filled, family gatherings with no conflict or stress. (This is especially hard when our whole society has become so divided, on issues that have a deep impact on dignity, health, and wellbeing.) And of course, a picture-perfect meal all made from scratch. (Has anyone else worked hard for this, and then had the flu, or COVID, strike your household on the morning of the big event?)

The people of God knew something of expectations. And they were tired. They were waiting for something that looked like swords to bring the justice they craved to the world. But as we hear in our scripture today, Isaiah told them that God promised swords turned into plowshares. The disciples following Jesus were expecting swords and military victory too — a worldly king who would overthrow the Romans. We too, I think, often expect, or at least wish, that God would come with practical physical power and right the wrongs of the world. Feed those who are hungry, so that no one need ever go without. End senseless hatred and violence, like that waged against the LGBTQ community this week at Club Q in Colorado Springs, as they gathered in one of the few places they feel safe to be themselves. Resolve the political tension and violence that seems to have infected the whole country, corrupting religion as an excuse to legislate oppression against so many who are vulnerable.

Things don't always happen the way we think they should, or expect they will. Our old church year has ended, and the new church year is beginning with Advent today. And as we join congregations in our Conference in reflecting on Great Expectations, now seems to be the perfect time to trade one set of expectations for another. Expectations that are informed and transformed by grace, which can lead us out of the pressure and shame we hold over ourselves, and others. And lead us into hope for a world that desperately needs it. In the midst of a world that we know is broken, Mary, in the Magnificat which we will sing together each Wednesday evening in Holden evening prayer, claims the promise of a world that hasn't yet come.

The dictionary defines “expectation” as a strong belief that something will happen in the future, a belief that someone will achieve something, leaning into a promise or hope that hasn't yet happened. This is something that scriptures talk about often, and it shows up in all of our scriptures today.

Our Advent journey of Great Expectations begins. As we enter into this season of waiting, watching, wondering, this first Sunday of Advent we light the candle of hope on our Advent wreath. Isaiah describes for us God's vision of hope for the world. The people, lifted up. An end to war, weapons turned into tools that we can use to care for and share the abundance God has created. All of us together, walking with God, as God's people. In Matthew, Jesus tells us that even though it hasn't happened yet, it will happen. Another friend defined “expectation” as a kind of resilience, where attitude and effort collide. In a world where we still witness violence, injustice, brokenness, we live and breathe and serve in hope for the promises of God that we know will come, claiming with our very bodies that it will come, when we least expect it. Many of us this morning engaged in an act of hope and resilience this morning, as we packed food for those who are hungry.

It's a choice we make, as people of faith, as followers of Jesus. We as God's beloved trade in the expectations that bring stress, resentment, and disappointment, and choose to watch, and wait, and notice the signs of Jesus alive in our midst, right here and now. To take small actions, in each moment, that bring the promises of God to life for those around us.

This season, we are invited into a deeper awareness of the hope, peace, joy, and love that flows out of expecting Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us. Even Jesus, we hear in Matthew, doesn't know the day or the hour when the kin-dom of God will come to pass, and we don't know what it might look like — it will likely be far beyond our expectations when it does. We gather today, knowing all the members of our Conference, and Christians around the world, are joined with us in hope.

We're invited in this season to wake up, to pay attention, and make the choice as to what expectations we will hold as we journey together this season. Today we center our hearts, and lean into grace-filled,

hopeful expectations, to claim God's presence with us. Together, each time we gather, we remind ourselves and one another that we are beloved, and God's love never fails, so we can trust in God's promise with hopeful expectation.

Thanks be to God.

\*\*\* Keywords \*\*\*

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