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Learning the art of surprise

Has it ever confused you that Advent does not begin with some Old Testament foretelling of Jesus coming, but rather a passage from right before Jesus is arrested? A little bit of Lent in our Advent. Which makes me confused about if I should be talking about Jesus's birth, resurrection, or second coming in some far-flung future. I believe the through-line is that we ought to be ready to expect the unexpected. A child of a peasant family and executed criminal shall be king! The first shall be last and the last first. Like a tree, if we want to grow high into the sky to reach for the Son, we've got to grow our roots deep into the firm foundation.

It is time to grow in the art of waiting to be surprised.

Are you prepared for Advent, the season of waiting? Are you prepared for Jesus to come again, God's people have been waiting for a messiah to come for a long time. Some thought he would be a mighty warrior, others thought he would be like Moses and take the Godly people into the desert, others a great peacemaker and judge between the nations.

However, what we get is a peasant child, announced with a glorious star in the heavens, some dirty shepherds, and wise foreigners. We get a preacher messiah who fits the expectations of some crowds but upsets the expectations of the religious establishment.

Surprise!

And so, Jesus writes to us from the eve of his arrest and crucifixion. And he has got to prepare the disciples (and all of us) not to be surprised. So he tells three parables.

1st. It is going to be obvious and all of the nations are going to be confused and scared. Then, the messiah will come with great power and glory. And will redeem the people, taking them for himself, like a king gathering his subjects.

2nd. It's going to be obvious. You know how the seasons turn, summer to fall to winter to spring then back to summer. Well, the coming of the Messiah will be like that, a great cycle like slavery to Exodus, Judges to Kings, exile to liberation. In fact, the Messiah has already come.

3rd, It's NOT going to be obvious. You may be so distracted by persecution or drunkenness that you are going to miss it if you are not ready 24/7.

So is Jesus far off or close at hand? Will the coming of Jesus be obvious or a mystery? Honestly, I think the answer is yes, Jesus's ministry on earth was, is, and will be a great sign seen by all, a seasonal event like Advent and Christmas, and like something no one expected. But most of all, the contradictions of these passages tell me that Jesus was, is, and will be a surprise.

So how do we grow in the art of being surprised?

We do so by growing our imaginations about who Jesus was/is/and will be. So let us not get comfortable, but dare to imagine. Let us return to a childhood faith, where we are not satisfied with easy answers, but always asking why, why, why.

Let me give you a taste of what I have been thinking about this week. This whole sermon I have been alluding to this paradox within Christianity that Jesus is both a peasant and king. Executed and returned. When we look at the Bible from where we are today. This seems like the most basic idea imaginable.

This Advent season, Jesus will continue to do a new thing and surprise our expectations. I hope that you will bring your questions, inspirations, and broken expectations as we prepare for the coming of Jesus.