

**PROMISES. EXPECTATIONS.**

Tonight's excerpts from Isaiah and David, Paul and Luke, resonate with **PROMISES** familiar to our lips and our ears. I wonder, though, whether they're really a part of our personal **EXPECTATIONS**.

That God will avenge and vindicate everyone (or at least the "everyone" of which we're a part) ? . . . that prosperity will be ours one day in overabundance ? . . . that those in power will be unseated in a fire of divine intervention that even the enemy will recognize ? . . . and that no one of us or our sons and daughters or our brothers or sisters or lovers will ever be harmed in the process ? . . . that's a bit more, I think, than we tend to hold as our real personal expectations.

**Think about it – the process of expectations.**

From birth, our lives are framed by promises, spoken and not.

Promises create expectations.

Expectations drive us in ways we might not even recognize.

We spend much of our lives disengaging from acquired expectations. We become disappointed. Disillusioned.

In time, the endless harangue of disillusionments gets to be tiresome, boorish. So, we re-energize. In *some few things* we become resolute, invested, pragmatic.

We grow. We become more realistically hopeful in a few, a very few, conscious, deliberate expectations.

**Let's think about it.** Feel your way back to those earliest expectations that took root in your own beginnings. Try these. How do those earliest expectations hold up now?

1. **Day One, Hour One:** *Cry and thou shalt be fed. Be held. Be soothed.* Hmmmm. Try crying now.
2. **The day you and your feet teamed up and made it across the room?** *Stumble and thou shalt be rescued. And applauded. And loved. Profusely.*
3. **Your first plunge at the beach:** *Dare anything, and someone will be there to help you survive.* Hmmmm.
4. **Your first bike:** *Others will cheer your success.* Yes?
5. **Your first Christmas:** *Ask and you shall receive.* Uh-huh.

6. **Until your Terrible Twos:** *Mostly, just lie there and look adorable and you shall be adored. And wanted. And loved. Wholly. Forever.* (Whatever happened to that one?)

**Today's excerpts from Isaiah, the Psalms, Paul, and Luke recite a familiar expectation that has been handed on in one form or another in almost every culture in the world. Religions, cultures, governments, moral leaders everywhere offer the same promise;** viz., that the dutiful will be rewarded and the oppressors, the cruelly rich, the rapists, the murderers, the arrogant empowered of the day will be punished, and everyone who is left will be blissful. And feel chosen. And know love.

Mostly, the dutiful die while waiting for the Promise to be fulfilled.

The undercurrent message – from our parents to the present -- always is, “Things will get better. You’ll see”.

Growing up changes our expectations of whether ... how ...and when things get better ...and who makes it happen when it does.

**We struggle for all the decades of our lives to adapt to our own broken expectations. Life unravels our expectations.** We learn that what's left is opportunity, and what **WE** make of it.

Whether it's the promises of governments, or the merchants of instant wealth, or our priests and nuns (those who have failed us, and those who continue to companion us), our parents, our teachers, our lovers -- **Life as it unfolds separates fantasy from the possible and the impossible.**

**Disappointment spawns disillusionment.** And disillusionment offers an open door to **ENLIGHTENMENT.**

In time, we form new expectations, and we set about making them happen. More humbly. More realistically. Less judgmentally. Often, with little more than personal conviction to lean on.

And if we're fortunate, someone by our side to love us, challenge us, inspire us. Someone to get up for. Someone to love. Someone who knows us so well we're no longer afraid to know ourselves. We become a new promise, recognizable even to ourselves.

**I LOVE IT WHEN WE COME TOGETHER TO SHARE THE OLD MESSAGES OF PROMISE THAT WERE HANDED ON TO US. THE OLD FIRES AND BELIEFS ARE RE-IGNITED.**

**YES** to Paul -- why not? If someone screws up, bring him back from his transgression with a spirit of gentleness. **YES**, watch out, knowing that you yourself are inclined to screw up, too. **YES**, carry each other's burdens with understanding; and carry your own

without burdening others. **YES**, persevere. Don't grow weary doing what is right. It **will** all come back to us, in ways beyond every expectation when we each work for the good of all.

**David, Paul, and Luke still give us the word of Hope.**

***“Say to God, ‘How awesome is your name!’ “***

***Be afraid of nothing. Go on your way. I am the one who is sending you out. The kingdom of God has come near to you. Nothing will hurt you. Don't be cocky. Feel reassured. YOUR NAMES ARE WRITTEN IN HEAVEN.***

**We create expectations for each other by the choices we make every day. It is the way WE live that enables anyone else to believe** that one day there will be no more sorrow. That every tear will be wiped from our eyes. That we will rejoice to find that all along, our names **were** written in heaven. That despite our fumbles and despite whatever anybody thinks of us, we're a shoe-in when *our* time comes because the ultimate Someone loves us and is taking care of us in ways we never expected.

**EXPECTATIONS!** How **we** live proves or disproves the promise. Let us just try to live gently with each other. Forgive gently. Love with determination. Go the extra mile. Make it easier for each other. Protect the ones others disdain. Speak up for the broken. Never lose heart.

**BUILD YOUR EXPECTATIONS SKY-HIGH. YOUR NAMES ARE WRITTEN IN HEAVEN. Tonight.**

**As poet Mary Oliver says so well, “Eternity is not later, or in any unfindable place”.**