

April 26, 2020 | Journey worship service

TEXT: [Luke 24:13–35](#)

By the Rev. Heather Schoenewolf

When I was pregnant with my son, my sisters passed along to me dog-eared copies of books about what I might expect during pregnancy. It was right there in black and white: when I might expect to feel the first kick, when I could expect the morning sickness to end, when I could expect the frequency of doctor's visits to pick up. After our son was born, there were more books: how often we would expect him to change his diapers; when we might expect him to roll over or smile for the first time. And even when something didn't go as expected, there were other books or articles or advice for that.

We like to know what to expect: what to expect when we go to college, buy a home, start a job, plan a wedding. And, frankly, one of the most helpful books I have ever received came from a social worker to my family when my grandma entered hospice care, so that we might know what to expect from this season of her dying. Establishing our expectations helps us to feel a little bit steadier in uncharted waters. Knowing what to expect helps us to feel more in control of things, especially during times of great transition and newness.

But let's be honest: we like to know what to expect *each day*. Alexa or Siri can tell us the weather so we know what to expect when we're picking out our clothes each morning; We keep daily calendars, plan menus, send out agendas so we know what to expect throughout the day. Expectations help us to be prepared, to be efficient, to bring our A game.

And now here we are in these "unprecedented times." Even now that we are in our sixth week of physical distancing, this season is not one that many—or perhaps even ANY—of us expected. I never expected to zoom a sermon from my guest room, or wipe down my kid's birthday presents with alcohol wipes wearing gloves. We find ourselves in very unexpected times, with no clear roadmap of what to expect moving forward. We expect that there will be more tests, an antibody test, and even a vaccine for this virus we're all trying so hard to avoid. But we don't know quite when. We expect that things will start opening up, but that date keeps shifting, and what that might look like is still unknown. And for me, at least, not knowing what to expect these days makes things just that much harder.

In this Easter season, our lectionary text gives us this story of two of Jesus' disciples, heading home to Emmaus from Jerusalem. They had had expectations: expectations that Jesus would be the Messiah—but then he was crucified; expectations, then that their crucified rabbi was gone, but then the women said that he had risen from the dead and had even appeared to them. They don't know what to expect. So they head home, talking and talking to try to figure things out.

Along comes a stranger who we soon realize is the Risen Christ, but who is still unrecognizable to the disciples who once sat at Jesus' feet. Just like in other stories in

other gospels where the risen Christ is unrecognizable to those closest to him, these disciples did not see that Jesus was the stranger among them. Jesus comes alongside them and listens to the story they tell about their rabbi in whom they had placed so much hope; about his shocking arrest and crucifixion; and then about the news the women shared that makes no sense. And then Jesus teaches—opening the scriptures to them going back to the story of Moses. He points out that Jesus might still be the one for whom they had been waiting even though the story didn't play out as they had expected. And then in the breaking of bread during a shared meal, the eyes of the disciples were opened and they see what they had been missing all along:

Jesus was with THEM. Jesus was with them in their questions and confusion. Jesus was with them as they walked away from the unexpected events they experienced and found sanctuary at home. Jesus was with them in their fear and in their hopes. Jesus was with them where they were.

Our Executive Minister wrote in a letter this week:

“In each case (in the Gospels) where (the disciples) failed to identify Jesus, the disciples were in a traumatic situation. When we are in circumstances of distress, we likewise are less likely to see Jesus in our situation, even if he is standing right in front of us. Where is Jesus in our current context of maintaining social distance, unable to gather for worship, battling death near and far, and suffering economic distress?...The stories of Jesus' appearances after Easter disclose that he is present whether or not his followers are aware of it.”¹

Richard Rohr says:

Every resurrection story seems to strongly affirm an ambiguous—yet certain—presence in very ordinary settings, like walking on the road to Emmaus with a stranger, roasting fish on the beach, or what appeared like a gardener to the Magdalene. These moments from Scripture set a stage of expectation and desire that God's presence can be seen in the ordinary and the material.”²

See, friends, there is hope. Even in this season of global pandemic—and it is only a season—we can expect that God is with US. In spite of the impact of the trauma on our lives, and how it may cloud our individual or collective vision—God in Christ still shows up: in a walk outdoors; in questions; in the naming of hopes and the naming of confusion; in the stories of Scripture; in a welcome extended; in a shared meal and broken bread.

God is with us, as God promised. Christ is with us, still, as the healer of the ill, the redeemer of our brokenness, the author of new life.

¹ Sorge, Rev. Sheldon

² Rohr, Richard, *The Universal Christ* p 30

We just need to shift our expectations so that we might see God at work in our midst—in this pandemic, through this pandemic—and even through us.

NPR host and author Celeste Headlee tells this story:

You know, I grew up with a very famous grandfather, and there was kind of a ritual in my home. People would come over to talk to my grandparents, and after they would leave, my mother would come over to us, and she'd say, "Do you know who that was? She was the runner-up to Miss America. He was the mayor of Sacramento. She won a Pulitzer Prize. He's a Russian ballet dancer." And I kind of grew up assuming everyone has some hidden, amazing thing about them. And honestly, I think it's what makes me a better host. I keep my mouth shut as often as I possibly can, I keep my mind open, and I'm always prepared to be amazed, and I'm never disappointed.

(She goes on to give this advice)

You do the same thing. Go out, talk to people, listen to people, and, most importantly, be prepared to be amazed.

As an Easter people, may this invitation be ours. May we find the grace to shift our expectations so that we might expect to be amazed by the living God who is with us still. May we expect to see that God is still at work in our world. May we expect to find Christ with us, even through our locked doors. May we expect that the God who triumphed over the grave will triumph over this pandemic and offer us all new and abundant life.

May we expect to be amazed—for with God all things are possible.

Amen.