

Exceeding Expectations

A homily preached by Jennifer A. Hudson at St. Paul's Episcopal Church on the Green, April 27, 2017.

In the name of the Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer. Amen.

The summer following my college graduation I went to visit a friend in Australia. We'd been pen and phone pals since high school and our anticipation of spending time together, of just being able to give each other a hug, had been great. Perhaps too great. While our initial meeting at the airport was filled with great emotion, what transpired over the next month was an incredible awkwardness around each other. To some degree, I think the experience was, for both of us, like meeting a childhood hero in person, only to find the meeting was not as you had anticipated. I wish we'd recognized our time as an opportunity instead of focusing on how things weren't going as pictured.

There can often be a danger in having great expectations. Just look at the Israelites in tonight's reading from Numbers. They lament the meat and produce they used to have in Egypt, and complain about how all they have in this unknown desert is manna. Their disappointment and doubt is apparent. And when Moses consults God, God responds by saying, in essence, "Sure, I'll give them what they ask for, to the point at which they won't want it anymore." Ask and ye shall receive, but not quite as you have in mind.

Even in tonight's Gospel from Luke we join two of the disciples who, on the way to Emmaus, encounter the risen Jesus without seeing it's him. They express their despair because they thought he'd been the one to redeem Israel. And yet they're blind to the fact that he's right there with them and *has* redeemed. Not until he breaks bread in the manner of the last supper do they recognize him. Imagine their astonishment!

The resurrection story is meant to astound us. That life can conquer death or that brighter days follow the dark moments in our lives can be unbelievable—whether we're in the desert, on the road to Emmaus, or in Australia.

Barbara Brown Taylor puts it this way in *Learning to Walk in the Dark*: "my set ideas get in my way. While I am looking for something large, bright, and unmistakably holy, God slips something small, dark, and apparently negligible

in my pocket. How many other treasures have I walked right by because they did not meet my standards? At least one of the day's lessons is about learning to let go of my bright ideas about God so that my eyes are open to the God who is."

How many times have we missed God in another person or an experience because it didn't meet our standards? How often have we boxed God into a certain image? How many gifts have we passed up because we expected God to aid us in a specific way?

People and events can let us down if we cling to certain expectations. But if we remove the blinders from our eyes, we'll see God offers us a lesson in them. Moreover, God will never disappoint us. God loves too much not to astonish us.