

3 Advent Celtic            Matthew 11:2-11  
Christ and Grace            December 15, 2019  
Robin Teasley

I still remember the Christmas when I was eleven. It was the Christmas I realized I was no longer a child. It was the year I didn't get anything "fun" for Christmas. In fact, I'm not sure I got anything I had put on my list. Oh, there were some new clothes but I had not yet discovered the thrill of having the latest fashions. I'm sure I got a few books and some jewelry and all these things were lovely, but where were the toys? What I know now is that I had outgrown the toys, that it was time to put away childish things. I had come downstairs expecting piles of brightly wrapped gifts of great joy, but instead found disappointment because Christmas was not what I expected that year.

We begin early on figuring out that life does not always come as our favorite thing wrapped up in paper and ribbons. Perhaps we are not popular or athletic or brilliant. The career we were so sure we wanted turned out to be unfulfilling, the perfect marriage fell apart, or the person we loved most in all the world died too soon. When our expectations are dashed, often we don't see that God is there with us in the midst of the disappointment or the fear or the grief.

And what of all this preparing the way for Christmas? How many expectations do we have, or do others have for us? All the right gifts, lots of decorations and beautifully baked cookies, and everyone happily gathered around the table in delightful conversation. When expectations are unmet, anger and guilt and sadness can make a holiday seem like a wilderness, or even a prison. We wonder where God is when nothing is going as we always imagined it would.

When we find ourselves imprisoned by unmet expectations, we might ask, as did John the Baptist, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" Or to put it another way, "God, nothing is going the way I had hoped and my world is falling apart. Where are you?"

John knew his work was to prepare the way for Jesus and that he must decrease for Jesus to increase. But my guess is he did not expect to end up in prison. John likely thought the awaited Messiah would make quick work of the oppressive power of the Roman government and that God's kingdom would be restored. But it didn't happen the way John expected and now he wondered if he had misunderstood. Like John, we learn that the changes and chances of this life are part of growing up, that sometimes we will find ourselves in prisons, and sometimes we will even build them for ourselves.

But the real hope, the promise is, that no matter where we are, God is with us. Emmanuel. Waiting with us in the darkest jail cell, walking with us through low valleys and up steep mountainsides, rejoicing with us in the Christmas moments of our lives. When we can let go of our own expectations and expect Jesus instead, we will be set free from all those things that hold us captive. When we expect Jesus, who is God with us- Emmanuel, we will not be disappointed, because we will receive the gift of greatest joy! Amen.