

**Reasonable Expectations | Dan McCoig | 29 Nov 2009**  
**Luke 21:25-36**

1.

Anxiety.

It is nothing more than a normal reaction to stress.

It helps us deal with a tense situation in the office, study harder for an exam, keep focused on an important speech.

In general, it helps us cope.

But when anxiety becomes an excessive, irrational dread of everyday situations, it can become disabling.

Anxiety will always be a part of our lives because stress will always be a part of our lives.

Stress and its ensuing anxiety are reasonable expectations.

An unreasonable expectation would be for everything to go exactly as we would wish every time, all the time -- which is what psychotherapists call magical thinking or downright delusional thinking.

2.

In countless places in the gospels, Jesus tell us to expect the unexpected.

He tells us to count on stress.

Jesus' words in Luke 21 is a prophetic word as to what may become of our world.

This passage is rife with anxiety.

The cosmos is in an uproar.

The sea and its waves roar – think of the Asian tsunami of 2004 times ten.

Nations will be beset with confusion.

Granted this passage belongs to the genre of apocalyptic literature, which is more often symbolic than literal.

For example, the “sea” in biblical literature refers to the godless, primordial chaos that existed prior to the dawn of God’s creation.

In John’s apocalypse in the Book of Revelation, in the new heaven and the new earth there is no more “sea.”

In other words, there will be no more chaos.

Jesus uses apocalyptic language to describe the world-shaking, chaotic, anxiety-producing events that will precede his coming.

At the heart of the message is Jesus’ coming.

The imagery of cloud and power and glory is again more symbolic than literal.

Clouds, borrowed from the Book of Daniel, represent glorification.

Jesus is saying, in a very literary way, that the ultimate sign that his kingdom has come will be many, many followers embracing and exalting him as Lord and embodying his kingdom in their lives.

Remember where the kingdom is in Luke’s gospel.

It is near and within us.

Remember what the kingdom looks like in Luke’s gospel – love of the least, care of neighbor, concern for the other and the outsider, sacrifice, self-denial, service . . .

Jesus’ words here in Luke 25 put my heart in my throat.

That’s not their intent, though.

Rather, this is what Luke wants us to hear: Despite the chaos in the world and all the anxiety it produces, the resurrected and glorified Jesus promises to use his lordship to set the world to rights once and for all.

Believe this.

Trust this.

Live by it.

Which when you think about the characters we heard from this morning is exactly what they did.

3.

We live in an age that manufactures fear by the bushel load and we can't seem to get enough.

I loose track of all the things that I am supposed to fear: terrorists, swine flu, financial collapse, school violence, too much government, too little government, global warming, overpopulation, crop failures, depletion of fisheries . . .

I'll stop there.

If we want to be afraid, there is certainly no dearth of things to fear.

But is fear what God would want to define and determine our lives.

Fear not or be not afraid occur countless times throughout the Bible.

I guess we could live in fear, but where is the good in that?

Or, and this is the direction in which Luke is pointing us, we could live in faith, in trust – preparing ourselves and our world for the scrutiny and the challenges to come.

Jesus urges us to “stand up and raise our heads, because our redemption is drawing near” (v. 28).

The fig tree parable reminds us to vigilantly look around for the signs of the kingdom and Jesus' own eternal “words” instead of constantly focusing on the daily stress-producing news of calamity and disaster.

As Jesus' followers, we are to be on guard.

When we identify and name the fears, anxieties and distractions of the people around us, we can begin to offer them hope and help them through toward a journey with Christ.

But beyond alertness, Jesus also encourages us to pray for the strength to “escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man” (v. 36).

Some biblical scholars see Jesus' warnings here as a reference to the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, which would take place within the lifetimes of those listening to him — thus the reference that “this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place” (v. 32).

Amid impending disaster and anxiety, Jesus urged them to keep their heads up and their knees down, praying for the strength to weather the storm and stand firm in his presence.

If our anxiety is setting off alarms everywhere we go, it might be time for us to step back, take a deep breath and offer prayer to the Lord who will make “all things new”

(Revelation 21:5).

There's no better way to lower your heart rate, your blood pressure and your body temperature, as well as your anxious spirit, than slowing down and communing with Christ.

Or, in the words of the Advent video – to worship fully.

Jesus reminds us that he is ultimately in charge.

The journey, though tough, will end well, and everything will be as good in the end as it was in the beginning of creation.

Amen.