

Sunday February 17, 2024

First Lesson Matthew 11: 28-30

Gospel Lesson: Mark 1: 9-15

Sermon Series: Enduring the Unexpected

Preacher: Kirstie J. Engel

- Good morning, Beloved Community of Lincoln First! Today, we are picking up on a sermon series that began on Ash Wednesday entitled Enduring.
- Every week leading up until Resurrection Sunday, which lands on March 31 this year, our Lenten journey will be a time of engaging a new spiritual growth opportunity to talk about and learn from so that on that great Resurrection Sunday, we will be able to look over our time together and celebrate the liberation that has come as a result of us doing this vital work together.

- Furthermore, the sermonic goal remains the same in all of the sermon series we have done together.
- I hope we might grow closer in our relationship with God in each series we embark upon as a Church community.
- My theological belief is that there is a message from these scriptural texts that is there for us all—to guide us and lead us through the trials and triumphs that life tends to throw our way.
- Furthermore, the hope that comes out of this particular sermon series for me is a closer understanding of what our repeating first lesson of Matthew 11: 28-30 promises us, which says, “Come to me, all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.

29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

- For my truth that may resonate with many of you this morning is that this is a growing edge for me—to be able to consistently come to God in what makes me weary and heavy-laden—
- I do not always do this task as well as I would like.
- I tend to carry burdens, anxieties, and fears upon my shoulders, and the only good this practice has done for me is create more burdens upon myself that have negatively impacted my health, joy, and relationships with others.
- Therefore, as I suspect this could be a challenge that many of us might wrestle with, I believe this sermon series could benefit us all, individually and collectively, as a Church community.
- And so the topic we are looking to endure this week is **the unexpected**.
- To ensure that we are all on the same page, I would like to review the definition of what it means

to endure to give more depth to our conversation this morning;

- To endure per Google gives us two definitions: the first definition is to suffer (something painful or difficult) patiently. Synonyms for this is to undergo, go through, live through, experience, to meet or encounter.
- The second definition is to remain in existence, to last, to hold on, abide, continue, persist, or to live on.
- The spiritual definition of enduring aligns with the first Google definition that I shared, where enduring means to bear up under or it is defined *as the power to withstand hardship or stress, especially the inward fortitude necessary*
- As I stated on Ash Wednesday, I would suspect that depending on the spiritual growth opportunity presented to us each week, we might find that all

of these definitions intersect and overlap in our Lenten journey.

- So, the practical question for us this morning is to consider the question of why the unexpected gives a lot us so much angst?
- For it is my experience that whether we are anticipating the unexpected good news or not-so-good news, it is the unexpectedness of it all that can produce a lot of anxiety either way...can I get an Amen?
- For instance, I will be getting a fine needle aspiration (FNA) on a large nodule they found on my thyroid this upcoming Tuesday to rule out thyroid cancer. Although it is about a 5% chance that it is cancer...I am anxious.
- On the flip side, I have found myself just as anxious about anticipating the unexpectedness of fun things like going on vacation—because I

believe it is the unknown of it all that can invoke this sense of anxiousness.

- These are some of the thoughts that I am bringing to our Gospel this morning as I invite us to **determine the unexpected** in our scripture and see how it might connect with our lived experience today.
- The passage begins with Jesus coming to the Jordan River to be baptized by John the Baptist.
- This would be **the first unexpected event** that would come up for John the Baptist, for I would imagine that never in John's shoes would he imagine that he would ever have the opportunity, let alone be asked to baptize the Son of God.
- John recognizes Jesus' divine nature and initially hesitates to baptize him, feeling unworthy.
- However, Jesus insists, and as he comes up from the water, **another unexpected event occurs** when the heavens open, the Holy Spirit descends

upon him like a dove, and a voice from heaven declares, "You are my beloved Son; with you, I am well pleased."

- This event marks the public revelation of Jesus' identity as the Son of God and the beginning of his ministry.
- Following Jesus's baptism, the Spirit immediately leads Jesus into the wilderness—one in which **I am still trying to discern if this would have been unexpected** for Jesus,
- My instinct would be inclined to say that the human side of Jesus would have been surprised that immediately after the heavenly dove scene he would be placed in a hellacious wilderness scene —
- The divine side of Jesus in my opinion, however, would not be surprised that this would be the course of his journey;

- Even my own life experience teaches me that the pursuit of justice, equity, and love for all will always be met with active resistance and wilderness temptations.
- Either way, the gospel reveals that amid this wilderness predicament, Jesus fasts and is tempted by Satan for forty days.
- This testing period resembles the Israelites' forty years in the wilderness and demonstrates Jesus' obedience to God and his victory over temptation. (V12-13)
- After overcoming the temptations, Jesus begins his public ministry in Galilee.
- Jesus's message is summarized in Mark 1:15, where he proclaims, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

- This proclamation marks the central theme of Jesus' ministry – the arrival of God's kingdom and the call to repentance and faith.
- This leads us all to wrestle **with the ultimate unexpected** of discerning what this good news might mean for its recipients then and today.
- You see, Church, in summary, Mark 1:9-15 introduces us to the pivotal moments in Jesus' life, including his baptism, the temptation in the wilderness, and the commencement of his public ministry with a proclamation about the nearness of God's kingdom.
- These events set the stage for the unfolding narrative of Jesus' teachings, miracles, and, ultimately, his sacrificial death and resurrection.
- However, **as good as all of this good news** may have meant for the undervalued and unloved people of this period, dare I say, it would have been a disruptive message for others who were ok

with the way things were—hence why it would be something that all of them would have to endure—this good news!

- For to place this gospel in laypersons terms where we all can hopefully understand, Jesus was in effect delivering a profound and life-altering message that echoes through the ages – the Good News of God's Kingdom.
- In a world filled with uncertainty, chaos, and longing, the Gospel brings us a message of hope, redemption, and the transformative power of God's eternal kingdom.
- In this good news, Jesus beckons us to respond with two crucial actions: repentance and belief.
- In which **the belief aspect** of this charge that we are being called to live out as a Church, as I see it, is a belief and acceptance of what God's kingdom would seek to restore;

- **I'm referring to a restoration** that Luke 4 informs us would proclaim good news to the poor...
- **It is a restoration** where the recovery of sight of the blind would be awakened;
- **It is a restoration** where broken hearts would be healed and the crushed would be enlivened with God's forgiveness;
- Looking at our present ministerial context, **it is a restoration** as members of Justice in Action to commit to seeking mental health care reform, criminal justice reform, affordable housing reform for all who do not have it—
- **As new community partners** of the Malone Center— it entails rising to the call of housing three pieces of vital programming during their transition....—the teens program, maternal wellness, and the k-8th grade after-school services that would extend these types of crucial

services to the very people that surrounds our Church in the Northeast part of Lincoln, Nebraska;

- Our church would provide this restoration **to hundreds of people** in our community and beyond who rely on safe spaces for children to be nurtured, for poverty to be addressed, and for education to come forth so that our community can thrive and soar— so that the Church can continue to thrive and soar!
- Furthermore, **where the call of repentance comes for us** is when we find excuses not to fulfill these types of missions.
- **The call to repentance** is when we unapologetically adopt the posture of the negligent neighbors of Matthew 25:44 to form our lips to ask 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you? '

- **The call to repentance** is when we lose sight of what the Church is called to be—community-centered, focused and minded;
- **The call to repentance is when we allow** the pressures of modern life, materialism, and secular ideologies to divert our focus from the eternal to the temporal—
- **The call to repentance is when we allow** petty disagreements, power struggles, and divisiveness among the body to hinder our effectiveness in fulfilling our mission—
- Finally, **the call to repentance** is to acknowledge that there is a valid place for the unexpected in our life journeys.
- For **it is in the unexpected** where events or situations often require us to think on our feet and come up with creative solutions. When faced with the unexpected, our brains may be stimulated to think

outside the box and find innovative approaches to challenges.

- **It is in the unexpected** where valuable learning experiences can be gained. It exposes us to new information, perspectives, and skills that we might not have encountered otherwise. Facing the unexpected can lead to personal and professional growth.
- **It is in the unexpected** that helps us to develop adaptability. Being flexible and open to change is a crucial skill in a rapidly evolving world. People who can adapt to unexpected circumstances tend to navigate challenges more successfully.
- **It is in the unexpected** that can lead to serendipitous discoveries and opportunities. What might initially seem like a setback or surprise can turn out to be a positive turn of events, leading to new connections, ideas, or experiences.
- **It is in the unexpected** that can disrupt routines and break monotony. It introduces novelty and unpredictability, preventing life from becoming too predictable. This can lead to a renewed

appreciation for diversity, different perspectives, and the richness of life.

- **It is in the unexpected** where we can build resilience. It strengthens our ability to bounce back from setbacks and face future uncertainties with a more resilient mindset.
- **it is in the unexpected** that brings joy and positive surprises. It could be a spontaneous act of kindness, a surprise gift, or an unexpected opportunity that brings happiness and excitement.
- **It is in the unexpected** that can be challenging, but overcoming challenges often brings a sense of accomplishment and motivation. It can fuel a drive to tackle new goals and overcome future obstacles.
- **Finally it is in the unexpected** that can be initially unsettling, but even in that opportunities for growth, learning, and positive outcomes can lead to a more fulfilling and resilient life. Embracing the unexpected with an open mind can unlock hidden potentials and possibilities.

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- As well-intentioned pursuers of love who commit to doing this work of embracing the unexpected—it is in my belief that this is when the first lesson will become more evident in lives;
- **We will find that there is rest**—because we have fought the good fight...
- **We find that there is rest** because we have done all we can to fulfill the course....
- As faith bearers, we have kept the faith and done our parts—thereby allowing the unexpected of the good news to fulfill us completely!
- In Jesus Name, let the Church Say Amen!