

“Fueling the Second Mile”
1 Corinthians 15:12-20; Luke 6:27-38
Rev. David Hutchinson
Sunday, February 24, 2019

In - - an old magazine cartoon - - a man is walking down the street.

It's one of those black and white - - one frame only cartoons.

The kind you find in the New Yorker.

The look on the man's face tells you that he is sad or depressed.

He is having - - “one of those days”.

Or - - “one of those WEEKS” - - if you know what I mean.

Anyone?

Well - - he's not happy - - and his head is hanging down - - so he can see only his feet.

He is not looking ahead - - really at all - - just down at his feet.

The thought bubble - - over his head - - shows him thinking:

“Well - - the other foot should be coming along any second now.”

And - - the caption - - over the cartoon frame reads:

“The era of reduced expectations”

What are OUR expectations?

What are our expectations of ourselves?

Our expectations of others?

Our expectations of the world around us?

Do we ever feel like we are living in an era - - of reduced expectations?

And what would it take for us to live - - in an era of - - heightened expectations instead?

To explore these questions a bit more ask yourself: What do you expect from life?

What do you expect?

Do you - - expect people to let you AHEAD of them in the supermarket line?

Do you expect people to - - clean your driveway of snow?

Or to rake your leaves - - when you're not looking?

Do you EXPECT people wash your dishes - - and pay your bills for you?

To send you a "thinking of you" card - - for no reason?

If course NOT! Right?

We don't EXPECT these things.

If we do we will probably be - - what? (Answer: Disappointed.)

Things like raking your neighbors leaves - - are SECOND MILE things.

As in the old expression - - "going the second mile".

Which - - by the way - - comes from the Bible.

In Jesus day - - Roman soldiers could demand Jews carry their pack.

And the law said - - they could demand it be carried for ONE mile.

In Matthew - - Jesus describes the life of discipleship by saying:

"If anyone forces you to go one mile for him - - go TWO!"

So - - Jesus - - EXPECTS it - - of us followers.

Jesus EXPECTS followers to - - go the second mile.

But - - is that what WE expect?

Is it REASONABLE to expect it - - in the world the way it is?

Maybe when you are all stranded in a snowstorm - - together.

Like I was last week - - on a freeway on ramp.

But the thing is - - it surprised me!

When we were all stranded there on the icy ramp - - and people all got out to push.

We all helped a stranger - - move their car.

And I was surprised - - a little. / I posted it on my FACEBOOK page.

I didn't EXPECT it.

And - - if it had been an ORDINARY day - - and we had not been TRAPPED - - would anyone have stopped - - to take the risk - - and take the time - - to help a stranded motorist?

Be honest.

NORMALLY - - we don't EXPECT it - - is my only point.

What we EXPECT is something else.

We expect - - maybe common courtesy.

We expect - - a nod of the head.

We expect - at least - that people won't all - - BUTT in FRONT of you - -

- - in the supermarket line.

We expect that - - AT LEAST - - people won't blow all THEIR leaves into YOUR yard.

Or throw THEIR snow - - on YOUR driveway!

Really - - is THAT too much to ask!!

I mean - - what kind of a world do we LIVE in!

Do you know what I mean!?

What do we REALLY - - EXPECT?

From life - - from others - - from ourselves?

Recently I was driving my car - - and I changed lanes a bit abruptly.

You see where this is going - - right?

I was looking for an off-ramp - - in an unfamiliar part of town.

It must have been OBVIOUS I was lost - - At least I think so. / And - - another driver sped up - - and then drove up beside me - - changed his original course - - just to get beside my window - - and took time out of his busy day - -

- - to yell at me through a closed window.

At first I was a little upset - - but then I thought - - what did I EXPECT!?

The recent government shutdown showdown - - raises a similar question about our government: what do we expect?

Tom Brady and Bill Belichick win another Super Bowl: what did we expect?

In the Bible - - Paul - - in the scripture reading for this morning - - was writing to some people in CORINTH - - who had VERY LOW expectations.

They had low expectations for their faith.

Specifically - - they were denying the resurrection.

They were like Jack Nicholson - - looking around the waiting room lobby - - at his psychiatrists office at all the depressed people and blurting out:

“Hey - - what if THIS is AS GOOD as it GETS?”

There’s no resurrection.

This is - - is good as it gets.

Paul writes: “If you don’t believe this one central thing - - and you have no reason at all to even EXPECT it - - then what’s the POINT - - of your preaching - - and all your church like actions - - it’s all IN VAIN”.

Do you really want - - a faith that is - - devoid of ANY expectation?

Like the information super-highway - - without any information?

That’s Paul’s question.

There were all kinds of beliefs going around Corinth - - in Paul's day.

But Paul was directing Jesus followers there - - back to the center of their faith.

Paul is urging them - - to go the SECOND MILE - - and really BELIEVE their faith.

He's - - sort of - - asking them:

“Hey - - if you don't buy the resurrection - - WHY go to the potluck dinners?”

For Paul - - the resurrection of Christ means - - WE are raised with him.

It means - - that SERIOUS losses in life - - are NOT the END.

Loss of a dream - - or despair - - do not WIN.

Paul is URGING the followers of Jesus:

EXPECT MORE - - from your faith!

I have to say - - the more I think of those people on the icy ON-RAMP last week - -
going the second mile - - to help someone - - - it has made me think.

What would it take - - to live THAT way?

On ORDINARY days - - when it was NOT snowing?

What would - - FUEL - - going the second mile - - in ME?

Paul's answer - - FAITH.

Real faith - - and confidence - - that Christ is raised - - even from DEATH.

And that that means - - we are raised with him.

Life is NOT gained - - by doing what is EXPECTED of us.

But rather - - by knowing that JESUS - - expects so much MORE for us.

Jesus preached about going the second mile.

Jesus said: “Love your ENEMIES”.

Pretty HIGH standards.

But if we get distracted by making faith some kind of ENDURANCE TEST - - we miss the point. / Searching around for the MAGIC PILL - - to allow YOU to act like a HERO every day - - is NOT what Jesus is calling us to. / And it's NOT what Paul was writing about.

Our actions - - every day - - are a RESPONSE to what God is DOING.

They're NOT - - EXTRA CREDIT - - to get God to NOTICE us.

All these second mile actions - - are BECAUSE we BELIEVE - - what God is doing.

God made a way - - in the WILDERNESS.

God ENTERED into the most CHALLENGING situations.

God was WITH Jesus - - on the CROSS.

And Christ was RAISED.

Going the SECOND MILE - - doesn't change that.

And going the second mile - - doesn't somehow EARN US - - access to some special power or place - - next to God.

Going the second mile - - is just - - living life how you would EXPECT - - IF...

How you would EXPECT - - IF you knew - - that God TRULY loved you.

And I'm here to tell you - - you ARE - - truly loved by God.

And that God - - is a God of - - resurrection.

I once heard a volunteer fireman say: "It just seemed - - like the right thing to do"

This fireman had helped save a man in a car crash.

25 years before - - that fireman had been in a dentist's office. / He needed some pretty extensive oral surgery. / He was terrified of the anesthetic - - and as the mask was being put on his face he shouted out, "No, no, no".

One of the nurses - - did what was NOT expected of her - - she leaned over and said:

She said: “Don’t be afraid - - I will not leave you”

And she didn’t.

He woke up after the surgery - - and there she was.

So - - 25 years later - - called to the scene of the accident - - they are using the “jaws of life” to pry open a wrecked taxi cab - - and the fireman looked down and responded to the terrified taxi driver: “Don’t be afraid - - I will not leave you”.

And he didn’t.

In spite of dripping gasoline - - and other risks.

Gasoline - - FUEL - - DRIPPING - - near a hot engine - -

And sparks from the “jaws of life”.

The next day - - the taxi driver saw the fireman in the hospital.

The taxi driver said:

“You’re crazy - - you know that - - we could have BOTH been killed”

The fireman just said:

“It just seemed - - like the right thing to do - - I was doing what anyone would do.”

Has anyone ever heard someone who OTHERS call a hero SAY - - of their actions:

“It’s just what I would expect anyone to do”

God’s AMAZING love - - for us...

- - evidenced by the RESURRECTION...

- - is God - - going the second mile for us.

And - - maybe - - it is fuel - - for us to go the second mile - - for others.

Amen.