

## B Love Service 2012 Because God loves us...

In preparation for this weekend, I was asked by Berdie Golden and Kim Popp to re-preach a sermon I preached 3 years ago. To be honest, for a pastor, that's a little like chewing yesterday's gum. On the other hand, if they are remembering a sermon from 3 years ago, it must have preached. As we talked about what they remembered I think what caught their attention was the concept of the

**“Expectation Gap.”** ([EXPECTATION GAP DEFINITION](http://www.ventureline.com/accounting.../E/expectation-gap-definition/))

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The **Expectation Gap** is a business term that I think we can apply to our faith. Initially, it was an auditing concept—the **gap** between what people think an auditor does and what an auditor can actually do. What ever it meant originally, I liked the term...

**Expectation Gap**--It's a good image for what many of us are experiencing these days.

This week alone I talked to,

- A man who had given his company 29 1/2 years but he was “down-sized” At age 60, he's looking for any job that might have health benefits.
- A woman facing divorce—this is not how she thought of herself... a divorced mother.
- A soon to retire man who had planned to travel around the world with his wife. His retirement has lost much of its value. Now he is considering delaying retirement and worries that his health may give out.
- A college graduate, former honor student, not able to find a job to support herself, let alone pay off college debt.

They're all describing an **Expectation Gap**.

“Life is not what I expected.”

So we come together today, each bringing our own experiences of the **Expectation Gap**, seeking words of comfort and hope.

Today is “Love Sunday”. Our service was written by members of our Joyful Noise team. All the texts and prayers point to God's gracious love for us and it would have been tempting to write a typical “God is Love” feel-good sermon.

When a pastor chooses what to preach, she not only studies the Bible passages but also the passages of people's lives that will hear the sermon. As I thought about the conversations I had had this week I realized I had a much more difficult sermon to write. (Thanks a lot to whoever chose the texts)

From the time we were little, our parents and Sunday School teachers tell us about God's love and that's good because God does love us.

Unfortunately, many people assume that means eventually things will always get better—everything will work out in the end. They live and work with this expectation, waiting for God to fix it. It's sort of a holy optimism.

However, Bad things do happen to good people. In this world, children die, moms and dads divorce, a man blows his house up. Skeptics ask “how can a loving God allow such tragedies, poverty, and war?”

Even the faithful have been known to whisper, “Where is God in this mess?” So, as people of faith, we may find ourselves in a theological **Expectation Gap**. **God is not what I expected**

We're not alone of course. Jesus did ministry among followers, including his disciples who believed he would be a political ruler. They all scoffed at Jesus' prediction that Jerusalem would be destroyed. None accepted his need to be crucified. They were in an **Expectation Gap**.

Paul too preached to young congregations that expected that Christ would return soon and all would be better and when Christ didn't return they presumed that he would at least protect them from suffering and persecution. We know: He did not. Christians have been persecuted for their faith down through the centuries.

So is God “love”...or not? And what does God's love look like? That was the topic of The God Squad article in Tuesday's Post Crescent Why do the righteous suffer? by The God Squad--Marc Gellman

*....The presumption is that God rewards the good we do and the faith we have with health, wealth and happiness--and in ways that prevent the righteous from ever suffering. In my understanding of Christianity, Judaism and Islam, this was never God's promise. God promises us an accompanied life, a beloved life, a blessed life and a hopeful life, but not a life unbuffeted by loss and sorrow. God is always with us through our sufferings to give us courage and hope. After death, God promises to welcome our souls into a realm closer to God than anything we can know in this life. this promise does not include paying us off for our goodness. Virtue is not a bribe or an insurance policy against suffering....*

So, God is love!

God never gives up loving us.

God's love is unconditional.

God's love is eternal—from before we were born and beyond death.

God's love is personal; we are known by name, each a loved child.

And ... God's love is incomprehensible.

Way beyond anything we can imagine.

However, sometimes we think that God's love means unconditional approval.

But that's not the case in good parenting and that's not the case with God. God does not approve of everything we do. There are limits. We must not presume on God's grace.

God's love is far bigger and includes times of compassion and judgment, grace and law, support and challenge.

So... how are we to live faithfully?

Paul's letter to the Philippians gives us clues.

1. **Be not anxious:** that's easier said than done of course. Like telling a child to not cry. We can stop the tears but not the pain. Anxiety is rooted in things that are out of our control. What keeps you up at night? Is it things you can change or things you can't change—the first step is to trust God and that God will remain faithful to us in the good times and bad? We will not be abandoned.
2. **Pray.** A classic Dennis the Menace cartoon depicts an irate Margaret haughtily proclaiming to Dennis as he walks by, "I'm not speaking to you, Dennis Mitchell!" The next frame shows Dennis, his eyes rolled heavenward, breathing a heartfelt, "Thank you, Lord" How would life change if our first response to blessing and difficulties would be to turn to God. God wants our prayers and in prayer God is powerfully present in our lives.
3. **Be Thankful:** How many of you think that Noah went up on the deck of the ark on the 39<sup>th</sup> day and thanked God for rain. Being thankful does not ask that you deny the reality of your lives but to remember that God is with us, upholding us, providing strength and courage.
4. **And then Peace:** The peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

**Jesus** by his death and resurrection has **bridged the gap** between sinful humanity and an ever-loving God.

And so we are assured that no suffering is beyond God's care and love. And we are promised that Jesus will enter into any and all of life's challenges, not to solve all

the problems of the world but to help us remain faithful and to live life here with integrity, care and compassion in spite of our current circumstances.

For those of us who experience **the Expectation Gaps** of a fallen world, it is in Christ that we will ultimately find our hope and peace. This is the good news of the gospel.