

Informed Consent

Isaiah 6:1-8

Psalm 29

What would you say if I told you that I had won 5 million dollars in the lottery? You would be excited for me wouldn't you? Life looks pretty good with 5 million dollars in the bank.

What if I told you I had contracted a rare disease while I was in Israel? Most likely you would be concerned for me, and if you are truthful, a little worried about catching it yourself, right?

Expectations: they might be based on previous experience, or our fears or our dreams, but whatever they're founded on, we have expectations about everything. We expect that winning the lottery will solve a lot of life's problems and create a lot of opportunities. We assume that having a strange illness is a terrible thing. Going to a nice restaurant for dinner with close friends will be nice. Taking a trip to some exotic, remote island would be wonderful. Getting married is exciting.

And what would you say if I were to ask you why you came here this morning? What did you expect to happen here?

Maybe you were expecting to sing some of your favorite hymns, or to hear a good message.

Maybe you came here expecting to get your batteries charged for the week ahead.

Perhaps you came expecting some comfort in the midst of uncertain times.

Maybe you didn't want to come at all, expecting it would be boring.

One of the things you learn early in life is that things don't always turn out like you think they will. Stories abound about lottery winners who are now penniless and miserable. I've met people who've told me that getting sick was the best thing that ever happened to them. Getting married is exciting, but it's also incredibly stressful. Dinner out with friends could land you in the hospital. Sometimes our expectations are too high or too low; and sometimes they are just plain wrong.

There is nothing to suggest that Isaiah expected anything but the usual when he went to the temple that day. Make his offering. Pray some prayers, maybe hang with the guys a while in the inner courtyard where the women aren't allowed to go;

meet up with the wife afterwards for a bite to eat. Just like he did each and every time he went to the temple.

There is nothing to suggest that Isaiah expected to find himself transported from the sanctuary in Jerusalem to The Sanctuary. The throne room of heaven itself, or at least the antechamber to it, where God's glory flowed out the door like the hem of God's robe. There was no indication that he went that day expecting to see armies of heavenly hosts, seraphs, singing hymns in praise of God's holiness, all the while covering their faces with their wings, lest they see God and die; nothing to lead us to believe that he expected to listen in on a conversation between God and the heavenly counsel concerning an upcoming mission that would be dangerous and difficult. There is nothing to suggest it, because nothing like that had ever happened to him before, and there was no reason to believe that that day would be any different. But it was, and his life was never the same again.

But here's the question: why didn't he expect it? How is it that he was blindsided by this vision? And more importantly, why don't *we* expect that on Sundays? Why don't we come here fully expecting to have some life-changing encounter with God? Why don't we come here expecting something big to happen?

This is, after all, the sanctuary. To be shocked to find God here is a little like going to your dentist's office for an appointment and being surprised that he's actually there! This is the place that God has set aside and designated as his dwelling place. This is our appointed meeting place and meeting time. It's not just a big auditorium or a fancy room set aside for special occasions in the same way that Great Aunt Lucinda's parlor was a fancy, special occasion kind of room. This is where heaven and earth intersect. This is God's throne room. It's the one place in all the world that we should expect to encounter God.

And isn't that the real reason we are here, anyway? A few weeks ago at the ConneX service Matt talked about this same passage, and the reason we come to worship: to connect with God. To experience God. To have some encounter with our creator and Lord. How did our expectations get so low, so tame? A brief, but engaging sermon? Music that makes us happy. Seeing good friends. Climate control that is neither too warm nor too cool, but just right? Not being bored to tears. Or maybe we come with no expectations, just habits. It is where we go, what we do on Sundays.

But long ago, before habit set in, before we quit expecting earth-shaking and settled for 'pleasant,' we came because we longed for God. We came because our

childhood or childlike awe and wonder and our passions created in us an aching for our lives to intersect with the Holy.

Now, in the interest of full disclosure, let me give you fair warning before you take this sermon to heart: hanging out where God hangs out is risky business. You might think you want to meet God, but do you really? This is God we are talking about, remember? And being around God isn't always a comforting, calming, safe or pleasant experience. Remember Isaiah's response to finding himself in the temple, just around the corner from God: woe is me! I am undone! I am dead meat! He was terrified, and how could he not be? Would you be comforted by seeing yourself up next to a God who is holy, holy, holy? Would your batteries be recharged by being sent to confront your country's sovereign and telling him that his days were numbered, his and his country's?

This God that we've come here to meet is, indeed, holy, holy, holy, not one to be taken lightly or casually. If even the seraphs cover their faces in his presence, and the foundations of the temple shake when he speaks, do we dare approach him haphazardly? And this God isn't known for being content with a desk job filling prayer orders and casual chats about the weather or theology. An encounter with this God might very well get you sent. Raise your hand in this God's presence, and quite likely God will take you up on it. Is that what you really want? Are you ready for that? Remember – Isaiah said send me before God ever told him what the mission was. Probably regretted it the rest of his days.

A few months ago, drivers in Illinois were startled by the electronic signs posted around road construction sites. We've seen those kinds of signs right out the front door of our church the past few months alerting drivers to things like bumps in the road and lane closures, things like that. Only these signs warned of more unexpected hazards ahead: Zombies in Area! Run! Caution, Raptors Ahead.

Maybe instead of the usual signs, the kitschy or even strictly informational signs we put out in front of churches reminding people that God answers knee mail, or that Sunday School begins at 9:30, maybe we need to put out signs that really grab people's attention and warn them about what they are getting into: Prepare to meet your God! Worship at 11:00; Fasten your seat belts!

In her book, *Teaching A Stone to Talk*, Annie Dillard wrote this fabulous commentary on our church-going habits:

It is madness to wear ladies' straw hats and velvet hats to church; we should all be wearing crash helmets. Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares; they should lash us to our pews. For the sleeping god may wake someday and take offense, or the waking god may draw us to where we can never return."

You're here to meet God, right? Maybe somewhere along the line you lost sight of that, but deep down, that's really what you want, isn't it? If it isn't, personally I can think of lots of other things to be spending a Sunday morning doing. But if it is, assuming that that is what you want, what you are hoping for, come with higher expectations. Some sermons will be okay, some will be dogs. The music won't always suit you. One week you'll freeze, the next week you'll have to fan yourself. But the one thing that will never change is that God will be here, ready to meet you; no matter how long the service runs, no matter how dry the message, God is here, waiting for you to raise your hand, to say, 'pick me.' You are taking a risk, coming here, know that. You can't encounter God and not be changed or challenged or sent. Scary business. But, exciting business, too. A risk well worth taking.