

July 9, 2017
Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30
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“What Did You Expect?”

Good morning! It is great to be back at Creekside and our church family. I've visited with some of you who were here last week and were able to hear Matthew Fike's sermon from Grand Rapids Annual Conference. A special thanks to the Media Center -- Lisa Vardaman and Kathy Nowicki -- for logging into the live stream, and to Diane Lund, Angi Harney, and Karen Lewallen for their leadership in worship. It probably won't surprise you to hear that Worship Team didn't know exactly how that all would go together -- or *if* it would go together. The only thing we really knew for sure is that it would be something different than what we expected.

This turns out to be a great lead-in to our text from the gospel of Matthew. These are the words of Jesus, who frankly sounds a little frustrated by the criticism that he's been getting from the Pharisees and some of the people about not being quite what they were expecting in a Messiah. I believe Jesus is a bit annoyed when he compares them to children in a marketplace. Whiney brats: half of you are upset because I'm not dancing to your tune or wailing along with your misery, and the other half of you either think I have a demon because I'm *not* eating, or that I'm a glutton and a sinner because I *am* eating. What is it with you people? How could anyone make you happy? If you have ever tried to lead a group of people, or tried to plan a vacation with another family -- or maybe just your own family -- you may be able to sympathize with Jesus on this one.

We all come into groups of people, civic organizations, school groups, churches -- with expectations. We can't help it. That's partly why visiting a new church, especially if we've been away from church for a while, or all our life, is so intimidating. We don't know what to expect. This nearly always creates anxiety -- at least when it's

happening to us. When the unexpected happens to someone else -- especially someone we don't know -- we show it on America's Funniest Home videos, or now YouTube -- and have a good laugh.

So in that spirit, I'm going to show you a series of short videos. They're funny because they end up differently than you might expect. [YouTube Unexpected Compilation]

You had to know that to be included in a collection called "The Unexpected Compilation," *something* was going to happen in each of these videos. But it turns out that being open to unexpected possibilities is one of the hallmarks of strength and resiliency. This doesn't mean that the unexpected is always something good, but our attitude can go a long way toward determining if we've gotten lemons or lemonade. Here's what Jesus said to the whiney folks who were criticizing him for not being the Messiah they expected: watch and see. Actually, the NRSV says, "Wisdom is vindicated by her deeds," but I prefer 'watch and see.' If this works out, you'll see the wisdom of it.

Forty-three of you filled out a survey last month, called a Positive Change Practices Inventory. Do you remember that? We filled it out after we watched the video on new leadership. That survey asked you to rate our congregation and pastoral staff on a variety of questions relating to Positive Language, Asking Questions, Integrity, and Vision. I was excited to see that the highest score was 25 out of 43 of you who strongly agree that we have a written vision statement. Then I realized that you filled out this survey while sitting in the Gathering Area, just under a 20 foot banner with our written vision statement: then I wondered what the other 18 of you were thinking. Communication is a long and ongoing process, and we can't assume that the message gets through the first time.

I was pleased overall with the results of that survey. They were more positive than I expected: according to the interpretive data at the end, Creekside has some change processes in place, but there's still room for improvement. I think this is a fair assessment. I am heartened by those of you who were able and willing to participate in the survey, but more than that, I am heartened by Jesus' words further on in Matthew 11. Here's why I believe we need to watch and see what

wisdom Jesus has for us; even if it takes us in a direction we didn't expect. In Matthew 11:25, Jesus prays, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants." Now, I have nothing against the wise and the intelligent -- I like them, I try to be like them, I respect the wisdom and intelligence of folks who are wiser and more intelligent than I am. But the kingdom of God is not a problem to be solved by the wise and intelligent, it is the mystery of God that is revealed in Jesus Christ. Jesus says, "No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him." It isn't about us figuring it out, it's about learning to see God more clearly.

God confounds our expectations because God is God and we are not. Our best ideas and plans and thoughts aren't in the same league as God's thoughts and plans. In Isaiah 55 8-9 God says, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways. For as the heavens are higher than the earth so are my ways higher than your ways." For me what this means is *not* that we should throw in the towel and stop thinking -- remember, we're not trying to be God; we're trying to be God's people. For me what this means is that if I'm watching for Jesus and actively seeking Jesus' wisdom to be revealed, that will be the clearest view I will get of the kingdom of God and God's will for us and for me. Anybody can do this -- even infants -- anybody with the humility to acknowledge that the kingdom of God is not going to come through our wisdom and intelligence, it comes in the person and through the grace of Jesus Christ.

We are going to have the chance to hear five Creekside ministry teams share during our Table Talk following the service. Although some people serve on more than one of those teams, this represents a significant number of people, many kinds of gifts, and a good measure of wisdom and intelligence. I hope you will listen carefully and find ways to express appreciation for the ways these folks serve our congregation. Don't be like those whiners that Jesus had to put up with, who said, "We thought you were going to do it like *this*. How come you're not doing it like *that*?" We need to hold our expectation lightly, because our goal is not to assert our own wisdom and intelligence, it is to discern how Jesus is working through these people to exceed our expectations. I hope this will help us to see

what is working, and what we need to keep affirming and encouraging.

You may get tired of hearing about mission and vision over the next few months -- or you may not even remember that we've been talking about it. Either way, here is what I want to say: our mission and vision are revealed in Jesus Christ. The more carefully we can listen to our teams and team leaders, the more honest and courageous we can be about our own gifts and how they might be used in the service of God's kingdom, and the more closely we follow Jesus, the closer we will be to discovering our mission as a congregation. Discovering and defining our mission is a great start, but it's the first step. Remember Jesus' words, "Wisdom is vindicated by her deeds." We'll know if we're going in the right direction if it's working: for us and for our neighbors.

I want to finish by considering the last verses of our text, verses 28-30. Jesus is quoting from the wisdom literature of the Old Testament: some of you will hear the echo of Handel's *Messiah* in the words, "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. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." Jesus is speaking, but he's quoting the words of Wisdom, Lady Wisdom who is gentle and humble and whose work rests lightly on our shoulders. These are the words of wisdom that I want to leave with you today: we all carry burdens; most of them aren't visible. We carry the weight of sorrow, rejection, disappointment, illness, and discouragement; these burdens drag us down or clank beneath our feet and make us stumble. The mission of God is not that kind of burden. The work of God should not be a crushing responsibility or a punishing task. Sometimes the people of God -- bless their hearts -- make God's mission feel like a heavy load. But I believe -- and I believe this because I've experienced it -- that walking with God brings us unexpected moments of peace and joy, and gives us the opportunity to lay down the weight of other people's expectations or our own expectations. The ability to affirm and celebrate what we're doing together is one of the surest signs that we're on the right path. Watch and see! If it isn't fantastic, that's because God isn't finished.