

EXPECTATIONS

August 18, 2019

Pentecost 10

[Isaiah 5:1-7](#)

[Luke 12:49-56](#)

(prayer)

It has been a different kind of summer for me.

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For the first time in my almost 30 years as an active ordained minister, I have not used any holiday time yet this summer.

It is standard in the *terms of call* that UCCan ministers receive a "minimum of one month vacation" per year. For 28 years, I used all (or most) of that during the summer.

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For my first several *bachelor* summers as a congregational minister, I still took *summer* holidays because I wanted to spend as much time as possible volunteering at summer camp. This pattern continued (to some degree) after I was married and had pre-school children even after I had changed churches.

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I came to serve this church the year that my oldest child was entering kindergarten and so, my pattern for the years since I have been in Leduc has been to match up my vacation time to school summer holidays.

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All of my kids still live at home and they all will be in high school or post-secondary this fall. However, times have changed. Three of them are adults and the youngest is close. They can (and do) manage their own lives quite well.

So... with an extended family wedding happening out of town on the last day of August, this year, I will be taking holidays mostly in September. Technically, I start my 2019 holidays this coming Friday and Patti and I will set out for her sister's wedding the following Monday.

Our kids who are working at summer camp will have to get home on their own (they will have our car) and all of them will have to start the new school year with their helicopter parents out of range this year. No one is going to be bringing the forgotten calculator or lunch to the office.

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When things start happening in new ways; when different opportunities and challenges appear on the horizon, we are faced with managing the changing expectations.

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It is hard *enough* to know what to expect when tomorrow's path bears some similarities to where we've been before, but all expectations are suspect when it is a completely *new way*.

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Okay, moving my holiday time is kind of a lame example (and a very privileged, first world problem), but I hope you see my point.

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Rev. T. Blaine Gregg

The prophet Isaiah tells of a woman singing an odd love song about her wine-making husband, who:

- bought a vineyard,
- loosened up the soil and painstakingly removed the stones
- planted top-quality vines, and
- built a watchtower to see that no harm came to the field or plants.

So confident was this vineyard owner that a bumper crop would result, that he proactively constructed a wine vat before even one grape was picked.

Expectations were high.

He probably bragged to his friends that he would be bringing the best wines to community gatherings for the foreseeable future.

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But the wine tasted awful!

It was no better than if a person just used grapes gathered from wild vines growing out in the side of the road.

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Such a disappointment.

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The parable that Isaiah shares doesn't tell us what went wrong: did the seller of the vines misrepresent their quality, did weather play a factor, was there some insect infestation or disease that was not dealt with? Maybe these transplanted vines did not get the proper ratios of nutrients from their new soil?

The *why* is not the point of the story.

It is the *what!*

Great tasting wine was expected and that is not what happened.

It is a parable about reacting to disappointment, not botany.

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Isaiah doesn't hide the meaning of the metaphor from his audience. God is the planter; the people are the planting... and they are not living up to their God's expectations.

God expected *justice* and *righteousness* from the people. Instead they were engaged in acts of violence leading to widespread despair.

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The rhetorical question the prophets asks the people is: *Given your unfaithfulness, how do you think God should react? If it was the vineyard owner, they'd be justified in ripping it all down and giving up, wouldn't they?*

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The next verses in Isaiah chapter five have the prophet painting a further picture of selfish greedy thinking that will not result in good things for the people. Basically, the message is... you think that God is disappointed about how things are going, well, the end results of your self-focused lives are not going to live up to expectations either.

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Isaiah is laying a pretty healthy guilt trip on the people of Judah. He is holding a mirror up to them wanting then to see the errors of their ways.

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Isaiah wanted the people to re-evaluated what they expected from their life choices.

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Expectations are a central theme in today's Luke reading, too.

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Jesus wanted to set realistic expectations for the resistance that faithful discipleship will bring. The kind of overarching compassion from the top to bottom of society that Jesus espoused was threatening to those who benefited from disparity.

Like those who chose bloodshed over justice in Isaiah's time, Jesus wanted his disciples to expect that... not everyone thinks that loving god and loving neighbour as oneself is all that great of a commandment.

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And closer to home (literally), Jesus wanted to help manage the disciples' expectations about how their families might react to their decision to follow Jesus' way. Those closest to the disciples - who had known them the longest - may hold different views on what it means to be faithful. Re-ordering priorities, re-shaping behaviours, and re-thinking goals can create new conflicts.

Jesus' disciples should expect resistance to the reality of their calling.

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I think that this remains good advice for modern followers of Jesus and to church communities of this early 21st century.

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Modern churches who have been paying close attention to their contexts in recent decades have adjusted expectations about how they may be viewed within their communities.

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Gone are the days when it can be assumed that people outside the church know and understand who we are.

Gone are the days when it can be assumed that a visitor to church on a Sunday morning realistically knows what to expect.

The [emerging church](#) movement helped the church learn that 'times and society' had changed since the days that christian church involvement was an assumed part of the canadian culture; and so... the church's approach (in terms of invitation and welcome) needed to evolve.

In the UCCan, emerging church theories manifested themselves in the [wondercafe and emerging spirit](#) programs of the first decade of the 2000s. St. David's embraced many of those ideas... our use of video projection, websites, social media, and that worship/play circle are direct results.

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And yet... of all the things that Jesus encouraged of his disciples, complacency was not one of them.

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The discipleship call remains: to be continuously examining and re-examining our contexts and the expectations that arise out of who and where we are now.

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In this current calendar year, your local Church Council is re-examining how St. David's expresses its mission... what it means to *welcome in and reach out* in the third decade of this century.

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Rev. T. Blaine Gregg

A dedicated and passionate group within this church has been exploring the willingness and need for the congregation to be Public, Intentional, and Explicit in our welcome of people of all gender identities and sexual orientations.

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With the merger of 2nd Leduc Scouts with 1st Leduc last year, the old church hall is less committed. An ad hoc committee has been exploring ideas about potential re-purposing of that space. I believe that they are getting close to bringing a proposal to the church council.

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And... there is still a separate ad hoc committee that is looking at a still bigger picture around what the physical space use and needs of the congregation might be in a decade from now.

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You can *expect* all of these conversations to move beyond these smaller groups into the whole of the congregation over the next few months. Some of them might even conflict with each other and we will need to wrestle with how things can be reconciled, if possible.

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(from Gathering: Pentecost 1 - 2019)

Renewal and change are everywhere, yet often we find it difficult to face renewal within the church. We get comfortable with patterns of traditional activity or the way the building looks, and we hate to change it. We would never want to live 20, 30, 50 years without changing our clothes, but change in the church can be hard.

No one should seek change for the sake of change. Patterns become traditions because they work. But sometimes a familiar complacency can blind us from wonderful opportunities that lay before us.

Jesus encourages his disciples to seek renewal: to find and focus energy in changes that tap into our inner spirit and curiosity and allow us to see new life for the time to come.

Our society has experienced great changes over the past century or so. Some historians tell us that the rate of change is something never experienced before.

The truth is that life has always been changeable and chaotic. This is not unique to our day and age.

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Jesus continues to call us to embrace a love of God and others as our founding principles of life, regardless of how we and the world evolves.

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The Apostle Paul famously wrote that love is patient and kind, joyful and enduring. The Corinthians were never told that love is complacent.

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St. David's United Church has existed - in one form or another - for 121+ years... dozens of ministers, hundreds (maybe thousands) of active faithful people... this congregation has endured not because of its claim to the past, but because of its commitment to being the best example of the body of Christ it is capable of being right now and being open to changing expectations and opportunities in the future.

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I look forward to discovering how you evolve over the next month while I'm on holidays.

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See you in October.

Rev. T. Blaine Gregg

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Let us pray:

Holy One, you are the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. And yet the church needs to be alive in the here and now. Help us to be servants of Jesus' gospel in the way that the world needs now. You expect nothing less of us.

Amen.

#578VU (tune #374) "As A Fire Is Meant For Burning"

Rev. T. Blaine Gregg