

## Novena of Grace Day 3 Homily

5 March 2018

2 Kings 5:1-15

Luke 4: 24-30

It is the worst kept secret that sometimes things don't happen the way we expect them to. Sometimes, when reality sets in, our expectations are exceeded, bringing about an unexpected happiness, and other times reality falls short of what we were hoping for, leaving our expectations unfulfilled and requiring some maintenance as to how we understand our world and our lives.

Many years ago, my friends and I heard that another friend of ours was entering the priesthood and we thought, "Yeah, that makes sense. That seems fitting for him. He'll make a great priest." My friends and I all thought that a vocation to religious life was a good fit for him. A few years later I told my friends that I was thinking about entering the Jesuits to become a priest and their reactions was, "What? You, you're going to...wait, what?" Needless to say, I got a bit of a different reaction. Everyone was a bit dumbfounded, including myself if I'm being honest. I fully didn't know what to expect, but I had this feeling that maybe I should answer this call to religious life, to at least think it over, give it a shot, and if it wasn't for me, well, then I could move on to the next thing. I had no idea that I would love my life as a Jesuit as much as I do. I had no expectation that I would find in my life as a Jesuit and as a priest such a deep, rich happiness. What's even funnier is when I told my sister, whom I am very close to, that I was thinking about becoming a Jesuit priest, she didn't believe me. She thought it was another elaborate practical joke that I was playing on her. In her defense, she had every right to think so. Her expectation was that this was some story I cooked up to mess with her, and this time she was not going to buy it. Eventually, as she and my parents dropped me off at the novitiate in Portland, she conceded that I was truly looking into being a priest, or I was taking a joke way too far.

Expectations can lead to moments of joy when our hopes become a reality. Or they can break our hearts when it becomes apparent that reality has eluded what we wanted, what we desired. And whether our

expectations lead to elation or sadness, whether they are uplifting and inspiring or disappointing and even infuriating, we have to allow ourselves to be malleable, flexible. We have to allow ourselves to be able to swell when our expectations are exceeded and shrink when they are not met fully. Because what just might reside in what we least expect is what we need the most. We might discover a happiness we never thought possible, a moment of trial or desolation that leads to a greater understanding of ourselves or a hard-fought joy and consolation, or a revelation that our own misperceptions and preconceived judgments have kept us from seeing our world and the people in it with the grandeur of vision required to even begin to acknowledge the depth and breathe of this milieu crafted by the hands of a loving God.

In our first reading, Naaman has an expectation. He expects Elisha to come out and greet him, to marvel at all his riches, his fine robes, and the numerous chariots and horses led by his soldiers who follow his commands. He is a man of means who is highly respected because, after all, he is a commander. But unfortunately, his riches, his robes, his power mean little to Elisha who sends a servant out with the message to go wash in the Jordan and his leprosy will be healed. Elisha does not even leave the house to stand before Naaman and call down the power of God in some elaborate spectacle that Naaman expects is fitting to cure him. And this infuriates Naaman. It sounds as if he is on the verge of ignoring Elisha's advice. But Naaman's servants compassionately point out that though he would have done something spectacular or even arduous in order to be healed, why would he not do something so simple as bathing in the Jordan. Such a mundane act is not what Naaman expects to heal him, but, in the end, he does get what he wants. He washes in the Jordan, and in doing so, he is made clean, freed from his leprosy. Though the process of his healing falls short of his expectations, he does get what he wanted.

Leading up to what we heard in our Gospel today, Jesus is first baptized, tested in the desert, and has now entered the synagogue in his home town of Nazareth where he has read from a scroll of the prophet Isaiah. What he reads is a proclamation that the good news will come to the poor, that the blind will see, the deaf will hear, the captives will be set free, and the oppressed will be liberated. And when he finishes reading from the scroll, he tells the people that all this that prophet foretold is fulfilled in their sight. At first, the people's

reaction is favorable. They see that this person, Jesus, speaks gracefully and with authority. But what follows, unique to Luke's Gospel, are the examples that Jesus gives the people. The first example Jesus gives is that though there were many widows in Israel during the time of Elijah when a famine was spreading over all the land, he came to the aid of a widow from a foreign land. The second is the example of Elisha we heard today, who, though there were many lepers during his days, he heals Naaman, a foreigner and enemy of Israel who is a Syrian commander. Both people helped by the prophets were not Israelites, their own people. And perhaps this is what angers the people because their expectation is that the Christ they are waiting for, the Messiah who will liberate them, the one to come who will speak with the authority of the prophets is supposed to be sent for them, not for others. This perhaps is the expectation of the people that is not met through Jesus' examples that show a prophet, the Christ, who comes not just for one group of people, but for others as well. And so the people become angry. They couldn't see or did not want to acknowledge that Jesus came not for the few, not for the many, but for all people.

The Jesus who was, is, and will always be, is the Jesus who will also always be for everyone. A Jesus who passes through the social and cultural boundaries, removing that which divides us, so that we might know more fully the loving care of God. That, I believe, we can expect.