April 19, 2015

“Not What We Expect”

Luke 22:54-62

**FCF**: Unprepared for what’s coming

**PROPOSITION**: (magnet) The Christian life is often not what we expect.

(anchor) We need to know this and live out of it.

**SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:**

Spring is in full bloom, time to enjoy the outdoors. And thank goodness that means more than just cutting the grass. It’s time for spring sports as well. Which, for me, brings memories of words from coaches – most of which is acceptable for mixed company. In soccer, “*Spread out*” because, of course, you need to play your position. In baseball, “*Get off your heels and on the balls of your feet*” because, of course, you need to be ready, prepared for what’s coming.

Such things are elementary, especially when the stakes are high. We need to be ready, to anticipate and be aware. Jesus would have us do the same thing as we follow Him – to be prepared for what’s coming. We see something of that in this second study in the life of Peter.

**SCRIPTURE READING**: Luke 22:54-62

**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION**

**SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

Instincts can steer you wrong. Doing what comes naturally can get you into trouble. This is why bug zappers can be so effective. Granted, there are competing theories as to what’s going on there. Is it messing with the bug’s navigational system? Is it tricking its sex drive? What is it that makes winged insects fly so persistently towards lights when it’s dark? Whatever it is, we know that “being drawn like a moth to flame” is never a good thing.

Instincts can steer you wrong. Doing what comes naturally can get you into trouble. This is why there’s broken glass in the crawlspace of our house. We had a plumber come out for a job this week. To get access to the pipes in question, he had to go under the house and then move an aquarium aside. And when he did this, he caught sight of a black snake that startled him. So now there is a dead snake in our yard and broken glass in the crawlspace of our house. Why? Instincts can steer you wrong. Doing what comes naturally can get you into trouble.

Which brings us to our text. But, first, let me recap last week. Last week, we looked at Jesus’ warning to the disciples in general and to Peter in particular (READ Luke 22:31-32). In response to this, Peter protested (READ Luke 22:33). What was going on? Peter’s poor estimation of three things – the struggle, himself, and Jesus. That’s what we looked at last week. Which takes us from Peter’s boast now to his failure. What going on here? Here’s what Peter learned. The Christian life is often not what we expect. We need to know this and live out of it.

The Christian life is often not what we expect. What do I mean by that? We see this in three ways here. First, the subtle attacks. Second, the surprising fronts. Third, a shocking love.

1. **SUBTLE ATTACKS**

First, the subtle attacks. This takes us back to something we saw last week. There is an enemy, a war, and battles to be fought. What then should we expect in terms of the attacks?

1. *Not Always a Full Assault*

Contrary to what we might think, it’s not always a full assault. Think of Peter’s case.

1. His visions of the dramatic

His protest to Jesus earlier implies he had visions of the dramatic, of violence and torture.

1. The scene in the garden

After all, when Jesus was being arrested, Peter struck with his sword, wounding a man. In fact, John tells us that the third of Peter’s accusers was a relative of this man and recognized Peter.

1. *But Often in the Ordinary*

But the attack Jesus has in mind comes not as a full assault but often in the ordinary.

1. Circumstances

And this was ordinary. The night is cool. Naturally, after he and John were granted access to the courtyard of the high priest, Peter sits by a fire to get warm. It’s late. He’s dropped his guard.

As a quick aside, this is one of the areas we see reason to trust the Gospel accounts. Each of the four relays what happened here slightly differently. You could see how the dynamics of dialogue around a nighttime fire would do that. But there was no effort by the early Church to clean this up, to harmonize what was written. Which is a mark of historicity and truthfulness.

1. Compromises

But again, these are ordinary circumstances. And in these ordinary circumstances, Peter makes terrible compromises. He rationalizes, pretends. He lies. To save his skin, he denies his Savior.

Why? The Christian life is often not what we expect. The attacks can be so subtle.

*Illustration:*

C. S. Lewis addresses this in The Screwtape Letters. The premise of the book is that it is a collection of letters between a senior tempter, Screwtape, and his underling. They’re trying to wreck the faith of a recent convert to Christianity. In letter 12, we read (READ quote):

You will say that these are very small sins; and doubtless, like all young tempters, you are anxious to be able to report spectacular wickedness. But do remember, the only thing that matters is the extent to which you separate the man from the Enemy. It does not matter how small the sins are provided that their cumulative effect is to edge the man away from the Light and out into the Nothing. Murder is no better than cards if cards can do the trick. Indeed the safest road to Hell is the gradual one—the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turning, without milestones, without signposts.

*Application:*

Let me ask you, what kind of attack were you expecting? What sort of assault were you anticipating? It may well prove to be the kind we heard of this past week of the 12 Christians thrown from the boat of refugees into the Mediterranean as they sailed from Libya to Italy.

Clearly, it can be that. But it is more often in the ordinary. That is where we are most often called to faithfulness, in the ordinary events and rhythms of life. Not in the spectacular but in the daily things. That’s where our spiritual muscle memory is formed for the extraordinary.

The Christian life is often not what we expect. The attacks can be so subtle.

1. **SURPRISING FRONTS**

And the fronts where these attacks occur can be so surprising. That’s the second thing. Think with me for a moment. Where should we expect to be attacked? What of Peter’s case?

1. *Not in Places of Weakness*

It wasn’t in places of weakness, where he might have assessed himself as lacking.

1. In theological knowledge

For Peter, at that time it might have been theological knowledge. For he had no formal training.

1. In practical holiness

Or it may have been in practical holiness. Certainly, that’s what the teachers of the law would have said. He’d failed to keep the Sabbath and failed to keep the right kind of company.

Places of weakness are where we’re sensitive and have our guard up. Well, it’s not there.

1. *But in Areas of Strength*

The attack came in his areas of strength, where he thought himself to be safe and secure.

1. Over what areas

Peter never would have envisioned himself retreating, running from a fight. But he did.

1. Over what people

Peter envisioned himself as being better than the others. But he turned out to be worse.

Why? The Christian life is often not what we expect. The fronts can be so surprising.

*Illustration:*

I was asked recently, “*Will your church ever endorse homosexuality?*” That’s a tricky question. On one hand, I can say, “*We don’t. Though we do try to love homosexuals*.” So, no, we don’t endorse homosexuality. But we might. And I say that because of history. Look back to 19th century Presbyterianism – so staunch in orthodoxy, pillars of the faith worth reading. But their successors tried to be relevant and began to make accommodations. And so things slipped. It didn’t come all at once. It was incremental. But right where we thought we were strong.

*Application:*

Where do you think the attack will come? It may well come where you think you’re weak, where your guard is up. But it may come where you think you’re secure and strong.

Where is that? Put another way, where are you most vulnerable, most open to attack? What sin are you most susceptible to? The one you think you’ll never commit. That’s where. The one you find to be most offensive in others. The one you presume yourself to be above.

The Christian life is often not what we expect. The fronts can be so surprising.

1. **SHOCKING LOVE**

But – and here’s the good news – Jesus’ love can be so shocking. Where does Peter end up? (READ Luke 22:61-62) Which makes you wonder something. What kind of look was this?

*Illustration:*

Some of you may remember the film *Robin Hood, Prince of Thieves* with Kevin Costner. There is a moment in the final battle scene that captures something of this look. One of Robin’s men is about to be put to death. Seeing this from across the courtyard, Robin trains an arrow on the executioner and lets it loose through the chaos of the fighting. The camera sits on the arrow as it flies straight and true. The target comes nearer and nearer, the axe-man gets larger and larger, finally filling the screen, and then – wham! – the arrow strikes him dead.

Back to the real world. Jesus’ look flew swift across another courtyard. The verb used here implies a close look, a deeply penetrating look, a knowing gaze that pierced right through.

1. *Not of Condemnation*

But what kind of look was it? Understand that it was not a look of condemnation.

1. Given their history

Think of their history. For three years, Peter had walked with Jesus, laughed and eaten with Him. Jesus had rescued him body and soul. He had poured His life into this former fisherman.

1. What you would expect

So you would expect Jesus not to look towards him but to turn away from him. To reject him.

1. *But of Compassion*

But this is not a rejection, a look of condemnation, but a look of compassion.

1. Even then

Even then, with everything that’s happening to Him, the wolves baying, Jesus loves this man.

1. An intensive gaze

(READ Luke 22:61a) This is clearly deliberate. Why does Jesus turn? He too has heard the rooster crow. Why does He look at Peter? With purpose, knowing and pursuing him. “*Peter,* *I knew what this would expose in you – the fear and the deceit. And that’s why I’m doing this*.”

Why? The Christian life is often not what we expect. His love can be so shocking.

*Application:*

When you fail, when you fall flat on your face, what will you need? Him. What had Peter just experienced? Steve Brown speaks to this in Three Free Sins (READ quote):

Let me tell you something that might shock you. Your disobedience, your failure, your rebellion, your struggle to be better—in short, your sin—is the greatest gift God has given you *if you know it.* Not only that. Your obedience, your faithfulness, your success, and your getting better is the most dangerous place you can be *when you know it.*

To lift you up, Jesus will lay you low. And when that happens, lift your eyes to see His fixed on you. And you’ll see something surprising – not a look of condemnation but of compassion.

The Christian life is often not what we expect. His love can be so shocking.

**CONCLUSION:**

Not all the news was bad this week. If nothing else, another trailer for the next *Star Wars* movie was released. It’s due in December and has promise. We hear Luke Skywalker and see glimpses of R2-D2, Han Solo, and Chewbacca. Of course, there won’t be any Yoda, the green 800-year-old Jedi Master. He passed on back in *The Empire Strikes Back*. But little Yoda got some great lines. Think back to Degobah. Some of you have heard me allude to this before. Luke is struggling in his Jedi training. He can’t see how he can possibly lift his X-Wing fighter out from the swamp. It’s different than sticks and rocks. To which Yoda says (READ quote), “*No, no different. Only different in your mind. You must unlearn what you have learned*.”

The same is true for us. We must unlearn what we have learned. Why? The Christian life is often not what we expect. We’re not anticipating the subtle attacks, not looking on the surprising fronts, not ready for this shocking love. We don’t expect these things. Why? Because the Christian life is about following Christ and He is often not what we expect.

Think back to what we read from Isaiah 55 (READ Isaiah 55:8-9). This is often taken as a general reference to God’s wisdom and power. Which is partly true. But specifically, in its context, this is speaking not just to God’s wisdom and power but His mercy and grace. It is especially there that we see all the more that His thoughts and ways are so much higher than our own. Which is exactly what Peter so desperately needed to learn. And us as well.

**PROPOSITION**: (magnet) The Christian life is often not what we expect.

(anchor) We need to know this and live out of it.