

Isaiah 9:2-7

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness - on them light has shined. You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder. For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. For all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood shall be burned as fuel for the fire. For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Might God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

Matthew 21:23-32

When he entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him as he was teaching, and said, "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?" Jesus said to them, "I will also ask you one question; if you tell me the answer, then I will also tell you by what authority I do these things. Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin?" And they argued with one another, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say to us, 'Why then did you not believe him?' But if we say, 'Of human origin, we are afraid of the crowd; for all regard John as a prophet.'" So they answered Jesus, "We do not know." And he said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.

"What do you think? A man had two sons; he went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.' He answered, 'I will not'; but later he changed his mind and went. The father went to the second and said the same, and he answered, 'I go, sir'; but he did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him; and even after you saw it, you did not change your minds and believe him.

Sermon

Anticipation, that feeling in your heart and mind that stirs with possibility and expectation. Sometime we anticipate a wonderful moment, a joyous occasion. Other time our anticipation is filled with dread.

A prophecy of hope for a new king in Jerusalem, a new king over Judah. The prophet Isaiah speaks of this new king that will bring light to the darkness of oppression that has been looming over Judah by the Assyrian Empire. Isaiah anticipates that this new king will bring peace and righteousness to the land, that he will be a Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace. Grand accolades for a hope filled future.

All that anticipation, that hope and waiting and wanting for the king to be the king that the people wanted, even needed. But in the end, he could not live up to their expectations. This new King, Hezekiah, this king who is supposed to resist the powers and principalities of Assyria, ultimately capitulated to the powers and principalities of Babylon. Judah will not fall for another generation, but King Hezekiah's reign was the beginning of the end for Judah.

Six hundred years later, the people of Judah were struggling with a different kingdom, this time the Roman Empire was the power and principality that kept Jerusalem in darkness. Anticipation and hope was again kindled in the anticipation of a new king. One who would set the people free from the Roman occupation and usher in an everlasting era of peace and prosperity for the Hebrew people. The anticipation was for a Messiah, an anointed man who would renew that calling of Isaiah to be a Wonderful Counselor, Might God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace.

At first, the people look to John the Baptizer for their hopes of a Messiah, but John points not to himself but to someone much greater. And so the anticipation grows even greater and the Spirit descends upon Jesus, it is as if the people have been present for a holy coronation. "Here is our king, here is our savior, here is the one we have been waiting for." The mantle of expectations is placed upon Jesus, and we ponder and hope that he will be the Wonderful Counselor.

But what does that even mean, to be a Wonderful Counselor. In our ears, we hear the calling of one who is comforter for those who struggle like a counselor who listens to our issues. Or we hear the calling of one who is a visionary, who leads and directs us in the way we are called to go like a guidance counselor who helps us see our potential. We hear the calling of one who is the lawyer who defends the plaintiff before the judge and the law. We hear the calling of one who is called to share wisdom and guidance in leading the people in the right direction.

The people anticipated a messiah who would call the people to rise up, to stand up to the Roman powers - a messiah that would lead and protect and defend the people. But Jesus failed to live up to their expectations. Instead of rising up a rebellion against

Roman, Jesus stood up against Jerusalem and the religious authorities instead. Those in authority want to know what authority Jesus has, because they know they didn't give him authority. But Jesus answers as he often does, indirectly. "Was what John was doing from heaven or was he just another crazy man from the wilderness?" They didn't dare say what they were thinking because they feared the crowd that could rise up against them.

Then the Wonderful Counselor does what wonderful counselor does, he teaches the authorities about what it means to do God's will, he tells them a story. "A father asks his sons to go and work in the vineyard, the first said 'No' but changed his mind later and worked in the vineyard. The second son said 'Sure' but never actually went into the vineyard. Which of these sons did the will of the Father?" Jesus asks his question directly to the religious authorities, and it is the authorities than answer with the crowd, "The first."

That is when Jesus pulls the rug out from under them. "You think that just because you say you believe, that you are doing the will of the father, but I tell you that the tax collectors and prostitutes will enter the kingdom of heaven before you. For John's message of repentance and new life was heard by the least and by those who were being left out. It is the tax collectors and prostitutes that have come to follow me. Everyday they work in the father's vineyard even while you sit in this beautiful temple with your beautiful clothes and comfortable lives."

Can you imagine the anticipation of those first settlers who came to this area and began meeting in homes to plan a new church. 165 years ago, can you image the hope and plans and expectations that helped first establish White Lick presbyterian? And think about the countless saints of the church who help maintain, rebuild, add on, and continue the mission and ministry of this congregation for all those years. We may never have been as fancy as a cathedral or as wealthy as a mega church, but we have been a place that has welcomed the people of this area and we have been working in the vineyard - in the wildwood - seeking to serve Christ. Imagine the anticipation of each of those saints who helped us get to this point... Now we must ask ourselves, what is our anticipation? Are we eagerly expecting the Wonderful Counselor to come, and to call us to the vineyard? This small congregation, nestled out of sight of the main streets and yet called to love and serve the people who live in our midst. For 165 years the people of White Lick has chosen to serve in the vineyard, and the Wonderful Counselor asks again, will you work in the vineyard, will we do the will of the father. The anticipation is building.