**Sermon for Wednesday 16th December 2020 at CCHB and PALS**

**Texts:-**

**Psalm 85:7-end**

**Luke 7:18 -23**

**Theme:- Expectations**

**Prayer**

**Heavenly Father, may you speak through my words and thoughts to enable us all to understand better your expectations of us today.**

**Through Jesus Christ our Lord**

**Amen.**

**Picture 1**

**Introduction**

Many years ago (late 1960’s) when I first started work as a careers officer for Liverpool City Council, I was somewhat rocked by the initial reaction of the careers teacher at one of the city’s secondary modern schools for boys:-

I presented myself at the school to which I had been assigned in order to arrange my involvement in their careers programme to be greeted by a male teacher who said:-

*Not only are you young, straight from college but you are also a woman as well!!!* (yes, I know!)

(shades of ‘Vicar of Dibley’)

In those far off days, before political correctness, the expectation was that boys would be advised by a male CO and the girls a woman – I was a new departure, and an inexperienced one at that!

Clearly the careers teacher had other expectations of the CO to be allocated to their school!

I am happy to say that once he had got that statement off his chest we did get along amazingly well. With my youthful enthusiasm and energy, I think that both the boys and teachers ended up being quite impressed with the programme I managed to arrange for them eg visit to the Schwepps factory in Liverpool. (The boys were allowed to drink any of the cans off the production line with the inevitable later consequences!)

A lesson here perhaps about not having prior expectations!

**Picture 2**

**We are, in the church calendar, in a time of expectation today. We are in the Advent season when we contemplate the birth of the baby Jesus to come, at Christmas, but also think about His second coming.**

**So what are our expectations today?**

As we all know our Christmas celebrations will be a little different this year as we take precautions against the Corona virus.

What about our expectations of Christ himself and indeed his eventual second coming?

His return to earth is hardly likely to be a rerun of the Christmas nativity story. What sort of person would we expect Christ to be?

We have no visual description of Christ in the Bible. We can only guess at his appearance by the clothes that would have been worn at the time and the fact that he would have been a young, fit, man with probably a swarthy appearance.

**Picture 3**

There are famously many different pictorial images by artists imagining what Christ looked like, and they are all different!

I can only imagine that Christ is unlikely to appear as a King with huge material wealth and power – maybe rather a kind young man in jeans and T shirt?

I was walking on a local footpath with a friend, recently, when we encountered a casually dressed young man out walking his dog. We exchanged greetings and walked past each other but before moving off the young man turned and asked ‘Is there anything that you would like me to pray for particularly?’ Well that was certainly unexpected! As it happens I could think of quite a few things! Had we encountered Jesus?? Not likely but you never know! It certainly had his style….

I think that our Gospel reading is all about **expectations:-**

**Picture 4**

**John the Baptist** – the last of the great prophets, currently languishing in prison, had sent 2 of his disciples to ask Jesus if he is, in fact, the Messiah they had all been waiting for.

A bit strange really – wouldn’t John already know if this was the man they had been expecting?

We actually can’t know what was in John’s mind. He may have already known very well who Jesus was but wanted to make it clear to everyone else.

(I do like the way they say ‘or should we expect someone else?’ very polite!)

Frustratingly, Jesus doesn’t give a straight answer but rather points to all the healing and good works he has performed. He implies ‘go back and tell John what I have been doing rather than who I am’

**Picture 5**

**Is this the whole point of the story?**

Maybe it doesn’t matter what Jesus looks like but rather what he does and this could be the message to us today. Is Jesus telling us that healing the sick and preaching the ‘Good News’ of God’s Kingdom is more important than anything else?

**What are our expectations of Christmas?**

We may not be able to gather in large groups this year but we can still help to spread God’s love out to the world. There will be many people who would benefit from a kind word or deed – via a phone call/doorstep visit/help with shopping etc.

Our church at CCHB will be taking well over 100 Christmas dinners out to people’s homes on Christmas Day.

We will be singing joyful carols in church and outside care homes and taking presents and food to folk who would otherwise have gone without.

**I think that this is what Jesus will be expecting of us this Christmas…**

**And what of His second coming?**

None of us can possibly know the day, or the hour, when Jesus will come again, but do we need to know?

Jesus has set us an example in how to behave. If we follow His example then we too should be ready to greet him whenever he comes again – which may not be in our lifetimes here on earth.

**How Exciting is that?**

**Prayer to finish:-**

Lord Jesus, Lord of the angels, help us to prepare ourselves to greet the God of all at Christmas. **Amen**

**Pictures**

1. **Image indicating ‘expectations’**
2. **Picture saying ‘Advent’**
3. **Different pictures of Christ**
4. **Picture of John the Baptist**
5. **Picture depicting ‘Love’/Good News/Peace/Healing**