

of the **Unexpected**



BY ALL RIGHTS AND EVERYTHING THAT IS HOLY I should be gazing out onto land blanketed by a foot of snow. It is January, after all, and here in the Midlands, where all storm systems meet, this is typically the coldest part of the coldest season of the year. The temperature outside should be a breath-sucking, back-snapping level of frigidity sufficient to drive the hardiest farmer or bricklayer into long johns, an insulated suit, and facial hair. The vista should be knee-deep white. I should gaze out my window across a sparkling, crystalline blanket of powder to the frozen pond, and beyond into the cotton-shrouded woods where the deer and turkeys and squirrels reveal themselves against the contrasting backdrop.

WHY, THEN, DO I GAZE OUT UPON A DESERT of brown and straw colored grass to a depleted pond thawing around the edges, and beyond into the furthest reaches of a naked stand of trees where deer and turkeys and squirrels are invisible against an identically colored backdrop? Why has my outerwear been reduced to a light jacket as I contemplate returning the screens to a few windows in the bright and over-warm sun room? And why are there cobwebs forming on the tractor I use to plow the drive of snow? Why? Because our winter weather has been unseasonably temperate, our precipitation—frozen or liquid—virtually nonexistent. Snow will not fall from a blue sky, and will not remain in temperatures hovering around fifty degrees.

WITHOUT ACTUAL KNOWLEDGE

It is not unreasonable to expect that in January it will be stunningly cold and snowy. It does not require an act of blind faith, nor does it reveal the imaginings of a lunatic. It just is. Usually.

Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit." Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away.

James 4:13-14

The phrase I hear myself repeating to the grinningly ignorant, who think it is perfectly wonderful that our winter climate has turned tropical, is, "But there's supposed to be snow out there. It's supposed to be *colder!*"

Funny word, "supposed." In the vernacular it has come to mean "This is what should be because it always has been"—implied, "I know the way things should be." But consider Webster's position on this word:

sup-posed (su poz'd) **adj.** 1. regarded as true, genuine, etc., without actual knowledge 2. merely imagined.

Two cardinal rules inevitably become obvious to anyone who is paying attention: first, Tomorrow is Unknown, and second, We aren't in Charge.

Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind and said,
"Who is this that darkens counsel
By words without knowledge?

Now gird up your loins like a man,
And I will ask you, and you instruct Me!
Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?
Tell Me, if you have understanding..."

Job 38:1-4

Just as Jehovah rather pointedly reprimanded Job, ("Who do you think you are?"), He surely sits upon His throne, amusedly shaking His head over the "supposed" wisdom of His created beings. Because a certain predictable pattern may have emerged over time, we deem ourselves to be prophets, able to predict what should occur tomorrow. But tomorrow remains unknown to mere mortals. And we are not the ones calling the shots; what will be will be decided by Someone else.

KINGS OVER A KINGDOM THAT DOES NOT EXIST

The Lord has generously gifted us with minds so imaginative and inventive that we suppose ourselves to be brilliant. We always think we are the smartest ones in the room. He also has built into us the capacity to imagine ourselves kings over a kingdom that does not exist. But there is only one kingdom, and it is His.

John the Baptist understood. He was a powerful, charismatic (if eccentric) servant of God in the days of Christ on the earth. He drew crowds, won the attention of the politicos and religious leaders, and was dramatically influential for God at a time of great upheaval and cynicism. His was a singular voice of piercing, melodic clarity in a

chorus of drab monotones. His was a perfect situation for self-imagined—and self-generated—grandeur. Today he would have his own cable show.

Yet when John came face to face with Jesus, in a moment he understood that he did not know tomorrow, and that he was not the one in charge.

"A man can receive nothing unless it has been given him from heaven. You yourselves are my witnesses that I said, 'I am not the Christ,' but, 'I have been sent ahead of Him.' He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. So this joy of mine has been made full. He must increase, but I must decrease."

John 3:27-30

*Eternal Power, whose high abode
Becomes the grandeur of a God:
Infinite lengths beyond the bounds
Where stars revolve their little rounds:*

*Thee while the first archangel sings,
He hides his face behind his wings:
And ranks of shining thrones around
Fall worshipping, and spread the ground.*

*Lord, what shall earth and ashes do?
We would adore our Maker too;
From sin and dust to Thee we cry,
The Great, the Holy, and the High.*

We all need to have a John the Baptist moment—preferably each morning upon rising. We all need a daily reminder—a declarative, soul searching, direction-altering epiphany—that God is in His heaven and we are not the ones on His throne. What may be unseasonable to us, is never unseasonable to God. The Christian bows before a sovereign who knows precisely what He is doing at all times. He knows tomorrow, because for Him it has already occurred. His vantage point is from outside our time; He dwells at once in our yesterday, tomorrow, and today and enjoys complete control over all things.

Even over what winter will look like in the Midlands.

*Earth, from afar, hath heard Thy fame,
And worms have learn'd to lisp Thy Name;
But Oh! the glories of Thy mind
Leave all our soaring thoughts behind.*

*God is in heaven, and men below:
Be short our tunes; our words be few:
A solemn reverence checks our songs,
And praise sits silent on our tongues.*

Isaac Watts