

There are no two words that have drive me absolutely crazier lately than these...generational talent. Now bear with me because I know, if you're not a sports person you're going to be like Pastor Tina, why? Why are we talking about football? But just go with me here. We're in this kind of sports desert right now. After a year where we went months with nothing and then months with *everything*, we've slipped a bit into that normal sports rhythm where we're in a bit of a lull when it comes to schedule. The NFL is in their offseason, spring training is just kicking up for baseball, basketball and hockey are in the middle of their seasons but the games aren't really vital yet. So you have to find something to fill the time, and more often than not, ESPN and sports talk are filling their time with the NFL draft.

It's still months away, but they just keep talking about it. They particularly keep talking about Trevor Lawrence, the hot shot Clemson QB slated to go number one to the Jacksonville Jaguars and whenever they talk about him those two words pop up: generational talent. He is going to be *the next big thing*, the next superstar to change the game. And yet, what drives me crazy is that it seems like every year now there is that quarterback, *the* generational talent. Last year it was Joe Burrow. A few years ago it was Baker Mayfield. Every year there's someone that is *generational talent*. But here's the thing, you can't have a generational talent every year!! You

can't really have multiple guys define a generation, otherwise it's really just talent. It's not game changing. It's not once in a lifetime. It's every year now, which just diminishes the weight of the narrative.

And what's even more maddening is that they talk about this solely with the guys that are destined to go number one, when the reality of the NFL is this, the guys who are legit generational talent are rarely the ones getting hours of press coverage months before their draft. Patrick Mahomes was drafted *tenth*, with the Bears taking Mitchell Trubisky who is anything generational talent ahead of him. Drew Brees was drafted number one but no one thought a six foot tall quarterback could change the game. Aaron Rodgers was drafted *24th* his draft year. And I mean, regardless of how I feel about him, when you're talking generational talent...Tom Brady was drafted *199th*, in the *sixth round*. No one was labeling him generational talent months before the draft, and here we are and like it or not he has completely changed and defined football.

We put all these expectations on the players we *think* are going to do the impossible and rewrite the sport and yet more often than not, it's the unexpected players, the players that don't get talked about, the players on the fringes of everyone's radar that make all the difference. One of the coolest things to me about sports is that it is so rarely the person you expect

to change the game that does it, and so when that actual generational talent comes along and you watch it blossom before your very eyes, all you can do is sit back in awe and go, wow, *where did that come from?*

It's a fact of life that so often expectations end up being our absolute downfall. They set us up for disappointment more than they set us up for reality. We go into a situation and we think *this* is how it's going to be, *this* is how it's going to play out, and we get ourselves all worked up, but then when it flounders, when it doesn't go as planned, when it doesn't go as expected, we're shattered and we don't know how to pick up the pieces because we've built it up so far in our heads. I think in some ways it's our human instinct to try and mold and shape the world to how we want it to play out, and the reality is, that's just not how the world works, but man if we don't adamantly try to make the world fit our expectations so we know what's coming, so we're prepared, so we get what we want. So often, we want nothing to do with the unexpected, because the unexpected is scary.

You see this play out in picture perfect clarity in our gospel this morning. Here you have the disciples, the insiders, Jesus' right hand guys, the ones who have been with him from the beginning, and Jesus thinks, you know what, it's time. It's time to let them in on what's about to go down. I need them prepared, I need them ready. So for the first time, Jesus opens up

to them about what is going to happen to him and he doesn't pull any punches. He tells them point blank, he is going to be rejected by leadership, killed, and then rise again. He doesn't try to couch his suffering in the comfort of the resurrection. He doesn't sugar coat his death. He just tells them what is going to happen, and whoa boy does Peter of all people not handle this well whatsoever.

I mean you want to talk about generational talent...Peter should be your guy, right? One of the first disciples called, the one who always seems to be right by Jesus' side, the one who was willing to try walking on water, the one that Jesus says will be the rock of the church. I mean there are twelve disciples, but Peter seems like he is *the disciple*, your number one draft pick. The guy you want on your team. And what happens? Jesus lays out the reality of his situation for them and Peter loses it, completely. He hauls Jesus aside and tells him in no uncertain terms that this cannot happen. Nope. No death. No suffering. Not happening. Could you imagine having the audacity to tell the Messiah what he can and cannot do? But that right there is the problem...Peter has all sorts of expectations for just what kind of Messiah Jesus is supposed to be and suffering and death just aren't on the list of acceptable actions.

But here's the thing...even with all of his expectations, Peter is one of the people you *expect* to get what's going on, right? I mean he's a disciple, he's been there the whole time. You would expect that he along with the rest of his brothers, even if this isn't the message they want to hear, would get it. Jesus never told them he was coming to bring power and glory and the strong arm of might. That's never been what Jesus was about, and so you would think that these guys, the people around Jesus would get that. They would understand when Jesus tells them what's really going to happen how it all fits together. He's been teaching about servanthood and giving of yourself for others and healing so of course his Messiahship would be about those things, not about power.

Yet, the crazy thing about Mark's gospel is that the people you expect to get it, the generational talent kind of people, they're the ones who don't understand. They can't see past their own expectations to who Jesus is. The people that *do* get it in Mark are the absolutely unexpected people. The people that understand the kind of Messiah Jesus has come to be are the sick and disabled, women who go unnamed and barely noticed, foreigners. These sixth round pick type of followers are the ones that get Jesus' core identity and understand that Jesus connects with their suffering through his own. They get that his kingdom isn't about power but about mercy, about

inclusivity rather than boundaries, about compassion not injustice. Jesus' kingdom and mission is so unexpected that only unexpected people get it.

So it begs the questions...which are we? I think...a little bit of both. I think in some ways when it comes to the type of Messiah Jesus is, we're just like the disciples. We think we're the ones that should get it the most, until Jesus tells us things, calls us to things that we don't want to hear. What do you mean discipleship is about giving of ourselves for others? What do you mean it's about reaching out to those on the margins? What do you mean it's about welcoming the stranger and speaking up against injustice? What do you mean we might have to suffer for the sake of the gospel? No, no. That's not what we signed up for. This is supposed to be about love and light and hope and warm, fuzzy things that don't call us out of our comfort zones into places that we don't want to go.

But then sometimes...I think we remember those moments when we have been the unnamed, the forgotten, the lost, the sick, the lonely, and the message of Christ being a Messiah like no other has come to us like a life saver in the middle of the ocean. We remember what it feels like to hear the amazing saving grace of our Messiah who knows what pain is, who is willing to reach across boundaries and walls and divides to find us where we are and call us into relationship, call us to a home, a place like no other

where we are accepted and loved as we are. We remember those times when we thought that no one would find us and Christ did, because Christ goes into those unexpected places and brings the living water of the gospel.

But what do we do with that? What does that call us to as we sit here in the midst of our Lenten journey? I think the heart of it is that it reminds that Christ has always, without fail, operated in unexpected ways, and because of that all of our earthly, humanly frail demands and expectations that we put on Christ, on faith, particularly on the faith of others, even upon just others in general have to be checked. Christ didn't come to serve the world and call us to service in all the ways that were expected. He came to create a different world, a better world, based not upon the expected, but upon the unexpected wonder that is love for neighbor, hope for the hopeless, service for all, justice for the oppressed, compassion for the forgotten, and community for the marginalized. The body of Christ isn't created based on our expectations, created of only expected, generational talent, but molded from broken, lost humans in need of love and compassion. You don't have to be the number one person to serve your neighbor in love, and Christ didn't build a kingdom only out of those who got it right 100% of the time. It's ok if you're unexpected. It's ok if you don't always get it. Christ is going to keep drafting you, over and over again. **AMEN!!!**