

## Things are Not What They Seem

I went shopping the other day for groceries. I went to my favorite market. It's always crowded but I thought the Parking Lot did not look too bad. When I went in there seemed to be just too many people. So, I tried to hurry. As I was walking by the snacks, I noticed a small sign that said, "Chocolate Covered Cashews." Now who could resist that. I love chocolate and I love cashews. I tossed them in the cart and looked forward to some cashews with chocolate. I finished my shopping and went on my merry way while thinking that this trip cost me more than the delivery of my two children. I put away the groceries and opened my cashews. They tasted funny and they looked funny. But I thought they had perhaps broken the cashews into bits and I ate some. 2 days later, after nibbling on them I decided to turn the box over and look at the label. I had been munching on chocolate covered banana chips. I thought, "How disgusting." The label I had read in the store must have been in front of a misplaced box. I wanted cashews not bananas. Who does that to a banana anyway? I thought of all the times my expectations had not met my reality. Like the time I bought a Coach Purse for a very good price. It turned out to be a fake. Or the time my Mother tried to tell me I would like beets and the reality was I never tried another beet. Actually, I don't think I even tasted the beet, I could tell by looking at it I would not like the taste (yes, I was that kind of child). I thought of all the people who are like this about church. Sometimes they have had a bad experience, or they have preconceived ideas about what it should be like. Someone once asked me if it was true that all Christians were rich. I asked for some clarification about the question and then explained that in terms of money the answer was no. He was disappointed because he thought that being a Christian was like winning the lottery. I told him it is, but you have to wait a long time to collect the prize. I had no idea what to expect when I first walked into a church, but I was greeted warmly and made to feel welcome. I think about that day and what would have happened if I had been ignored and or treated as if I was sitting in the wrong pew. In no other place do first impressions have such a lasting impact.

Luke 15:3-7 Then Jesus told them this parable: Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it. And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, "Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep. I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent."

Lord, be with us this day. We thank you for the blessing of the day. Be with those who are grieving, give them your peace. Be with those who are ill, give them your healing touch. We ask your blessings upon our church. May we be a blessing to those in our community but also to each other. Be with our Pastor, bless his ministry and be with his family. Be with our staff and leaders, give them your guidance as they lead our church. Be with our country, may we celebrate what we have in common while accepting our differences. In Jesus name we pray, Amen

Grace Epperson