

What Do You Fear? | Peace
Matthew 11:1-11
Advent Week Two | Sunday, December 7, 2025

John was devastated. He was a nervous wreck. He was supposed to be the new Elijah. As we talked about last week, he was supposed to be the one making ready a people prepared for the Lord. He was supposed to be the one getting Israel ready for the Messiah, the coming king.

And yet here he was, in prison. What could he do from prison? How was he going to prepare his people for the king and his new kingdom?

And what's worse, he was beginning to lose hope in his cousin Jesus, the one he had been telling everyone about. The one he had been absolutely convinced *was* the coming king, the one who he had believed would lead their people to freedom.

But Jesus wasn't behaving like a king. Quite the opposite in fact. He wasn't building up an army of followers. Sure, he had crowds following him, but those consisted mostly of poor peasants, gawkers and sightseers. And they weren't carrying weapons with which to overthrow the Romans. At best, they might be carrying lunch. In fact, Jesus appeared to have only about 12 close, dedicated followers.

And his speeches weren't about revolution. He hardly ever talked about Roman oppression. In fact, he spent a lot more time criticizing the Jewish leadership than he did the Romans. He didn't spend much, if any time, with the Jewish movers and shakers in Jerusalem, the ones who might be able to get things done. Instead, he seemed to spend all his time with the peasants up in God-forsaken Galilee. He never mentioned the need for an armed uprising. Instead, he stressed how everyone needed to look first inside themselves and change from

within. He didn't strike out against the Romans. Instead, he spent all his time healing the sick and casting demons out of people; instead of bloodshed, he seemed intent on bringing healing and wholeness. He didn't advocate war. He preached peace.

And, of course, John didn't have anything against that. But business was business. Kingdom building was kingdom building. And everyone knows, to build a kingdom, sometimes you've got to break a few eggs; or, in this case, kill a few Romans.

That's what the Romans did. It was called the Pax Romana, Roman peace. And the Romans *had* brought Peace ... of a sort. Sure, it was peace at the end of a sword ... but it was peace. And that's what John was looking for. Peace. Maybe the Pax Judea?

But that didn't seem to be happening, So, John wondered whether Jesus was really the guy. John was afraid he might have been mistaken. And worse, he was afraid he had been wasting his time and his life getting people ready for Jesus. He was afraid that all that time in the wilderness, wearing sackcloth and eating grasshoppers and honey had been wasted. He was afraid his fight for truth and justice and ultimate peace had been for nothing.

Can anyone relate? We suffer with much the same fear as John.

We spend our time and our money fighting for truth & justice & mercy & peace, while more and more people, here and around world, are oppressed and hungry, and the very idea of peace seems to be increasingly remote.

And then we look at our own lives. Maybe we thought following Jesus would make life easier. Maybe we thought following Jesus would solve all our problems, only to find they're still there. Jesus tells us about God's mercy, but many of us are still secretly afraid of God's judgment

when it's all said and done. And we're even afraid of fear itself: doesn't our fear just prove we don't have the kind of faith that's going to save us? So many of us aren't experiencing that "peace that surpasses understanding" that we've been promised. And so, maybe we're starting to question our faith just a little.

Like John as he languished in prison, we'd like to ask Jesus: Are you really the one? Have we been wasting our time? Have we been wasting our lives following you?

And if we did, we might get a response like Jesus gave John. Of course, Jesus' response isn't straightforward. This *is* Jesus after all. He didn't say "yes" or "no." Instead, he quoted scripture. Specifically, he quoted the prophecy of Isaiah, chs 35 and 61: "The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, those with a skin disease are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them" (vv. 4-5).

To us, it might seem like a non-answer. But John knew the scripture. John understood. Both of the prophecies relate to salvation, freedom, peace. In those scriptures, delivered by the prophet Isaiah to the Jewish people as they languished in captivity in Babylon, God told God's people what He was going to do for them; how He was going to save them from their slavery and give them peace.

And God was very clear that this salvation would not be the result of military conquest. It wouldn't involve a Jewish military overthrow of the Babylonians. God said that God's salvation—God's kingdom—would be characterized by the blind receiving sight, the lame walking, the deaf hearing, the sick being healed, the Good News being shared; exactly the things Jesus was doing.

In other words, Jesus is telling John that he *is* the Messiah, he *is* the coming king. He's just a different kind of king than John thought. The fact that he isn't kicking butt and taking names isn't a problem. In fact, it's a sign—it's THE sign—that he's the real Messiah; that he's bringing with him God's salvation ... God's kingdom ... God's peace.

Jesus is saying that God's peace isn't being ushered in on the point of a spear. It isn't being ushered in with trumpets and fanfare and pageantry. It isn't being ushered in in any way that we might expect. It's being ushered in with love. One conversation, one kind word, one healing at a time.

And then, Jesus finishes with this: "And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me." And while this line may seem confusing to us, in context it makes perfect sense. Because there actually were people who were offended by Jesus. Among them were the Jewish zealots, who expected the Messiah to be a conquering hero ... to be the one who conquered the Romans and ushered in the Pax Judea.

And so, in this last line, Jesus invites John to put aside his worldly understanding of God's kingdom, and get on board with God's actual plan for humanity: peace not enforced through power and tyranny, but real peace; peace born through love. And in the process, he implicitly assures John that John hasn't been wasting his time; that the fact John's ministry—or Jesus' ministry—hasn't resulted immediately in world peace isn't a problem. In fact, that's how God's kingdom—real peace—works: through those small, individual acts of kindness and love.

We may find ourselves with the same fears as John. When all of our hard work for peace and justice and mercy seems to amount to nothing more than a drop in the bucket. When our

kindness is treated as weakness. When we see the strong taking advantage of the weak. When it seems as if the just, kind, and compassionate world Jesus came to make a reality is receding further and further from our grasp. When our faith seems to be teetering on the edge. We're tempted to fear: Does it matter? Does anything matter? What's the point?

And Jesus answers us, just as he answered John. Yes. It doesn't just matter. It's vital. Because the only way to true peace is love.