

Matthew 11: 2 - 11

2 When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples 3 and said to him, “Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?” 4 Jesus answered them, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: 5 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. 6 And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me.”

7 As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? 8 What, then, did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces. 9 What, then, did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. 10 This is the one about whom it is written,

‘See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way before you.’

11 “Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist, yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

"Advent: A Time to Recognize"

Matthew 11: 2 - 11

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Third Sunday in Advent

La Habra UMC

by Rev. Soomee Kim

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"Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?"

John the Baptist sent word to Jesus Christ.
Even, those of us who are committed to Christian faith,
and who have been life-long Christians,
have our doubts, sometimes, as did John the Baptist.

To believe in God at all, for us Christians,
is to believe in Jesus as our Savior,
as a power in the history of our world, past, present, and future.
Surely, we want to trust that
he has not let the fate of our world slip from his grasp.
We want to be sure that he is in control.

And yet, and yet, and yet
"Is this all?", we sometimes wonder.
The history of a dinky, hapless middle eastern nation
long time ago
and their recorded reflections on that history?

Is that all we can go by?
A Palestinian carpenter, born in a manger,
preaching on a hillside,
and executed on a cross.
Is that the whole identity of our Savior?

The only resources we have are
the recorded reflections of his few followers upon that birth,

and life and death.

The practices and prayers of a community of people
who believe in him as the savior
and await the triumph of his kingdom
in some undetermined time to come.
Is that all we have
to hang our hopes and faith?

And in the meantime the world is in near chaos.
We hear and experience overwhelming problems and massive suffering.
The leaders of this world seem more focused in gaining power
than caring people.
The poor get poorer, and the powerful gain more advantages.

Is this all?
Was Jesus he who was to come?
Is Jesus Christ the one who is to come?
Or shall we look for another?

John's question addressed to Jesus is a reasonable one
in a world like John's and also ours.
It comes very much alive,
even to us Christians,
even in our traditional celebration of this Advent season.

How do we know?
Where is God's coming to us, God's presence, the power?
Where are they evident in our world today?

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So we go back to studying our scripture.

John the Baptist, whom we've met last week,
who was preparing the way for the One,
is now locked up in prison.
But even in the prison, he hears about the wonderful things Jesus is doing,
so he sends his disciples to ask the question.
"Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?"

We almost expect an answer from Jesus
that is full of self-justification,
or at least an appeal to the source of his authority.
But Jesus does not go into any deep philosophical discussion
about who He is.
Instead He simply points to what he is doing.

"the blind receive their sight,
the lame walk,
the lepers are raised,
and the poor have good news brought to them."

After giving the list of the result of his work,
Jesus leaves the disciples of John to form their own conclusion.

But we don't hear about their conclusion or
what John decideds after gathering all the stories.
Then the rest of the scripture
deals with who John was.

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Quite a some time ago, the track of a three-toed dinosaur
has been found on the top of coal strata
high up on the cliffs
near Grand Junction, Colorado.
We have never seen the animal itself,
but we have seen its footprint.
And from the footprint, we concluded
that there was this three toed dinosaur.

In the same way,
we have never seen God or Jesus;
but we can study the imprints God has left,
evidences of his love, creatorship, upon the face of the world.

Advent is the season to recognize the evidences of God
in the most obscure places on earth.

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Whether we truly believe it with the whole heart or not,
Baby of Bethlehem is the greatest evidence
of the real character of God,
and the real meaning of Christmas.

Here is a poem that really helped me to see the symbolism of
Christ coming as a baby.

It is written by Robert A. Rains, in his book Living the Question.

*God speaks to us in God's own special sign language-
a baby.
Not much.
A small December child.
A baby is birth, beginnings, potential without guarantee.
A baby is helpless but not hopeless.
A baby is someone to watch.
A baby is the future appearing now.
Are there baby-signs from God
signaling hope to us
watchers on the hillsides?*

Can you see the connection?

God doesn't want big political revolution.
God doesn't see most hopeful signs in the economic prosperity.
God sends the baby as our Savior to show us what God has in mind.

A baby is helpless but not hopeless.
A baby is someone to watch.
A baby is the future appearing now.

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"Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?"
Albert Schweitzer answered to this question in a very insightful way.
I am quoting him from the book The Quest of the Historical Jesus.

"He comes to us as one unknown,
without a name, as of old,

by the lake-side.
As he came to those men who knew Him not.
he speaks to us the same word:
"Follow thou me!"
and sets us to the task
which He has to fulfill for our time.
He commands.
And to those obey,
whether they be wise or simple,
He will reveal himself in the toils,
the conflicts, the sufferings
which they shall pass through
on His fellowship,
and as an ineffable mystery,
they shall learn and on their own
experience Who He is."

According to Albert Schweitzer,
it seems we'll be able to recognize our Savior
as we decide to follow his footsteps,
and continue the work he had done in the world,
And in our toils, the conflicts, the sufferings
Jesus reveals himself to us.

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So then the question,
"Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?"
can only be asked by those who is willing to spread the same spirit,
the spirit of love and service in the chaotic, uncertain world.

It does not matter how precisely we are able to define
"who I am" in fancy words.
What we do is what precisely defines us.

What we do, how we live, and where we focus our proprieties,
determines who we are, whether we are children of God or not.

It's like a copy machine.
We are like those copies that are made from an original.

These days, the copy machines are so good, we can't tell which is original or which is copy.

When we're growing in our relationship with Jesus,
people see us as a copy of him.
They don't see the original,
but they can see what the original looks like.
As the song says, "They will know we are Christian by our love."

Also if we expand that thought a step further,
We can show the world, Jesus, wherever we are.

It is an awesome feeling,
but people will know God through us.

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I have one more point to make about the question John the Baptist had.

From where I am in my age and the stage of my life, I saw another side of the question:

“Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?”

Last week, I described three reasons about why he doesn't show up on Christmas celebrations. And....

- One of the reasons can be that he was just the warm-up act for Jesus' birth: And he knew that was his calling.... To prepare the way of the Lord and make his paths straight.

John was in prison and knew his days were numbered. He needed to ask himself whether he had done all he could to accomplish his calling.

“Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?”

As a responsible person, John needed to know if his life was well lived: That question, therefore, contains a desire to be affirmed:

Lord, have I done all I needed to do?

I am about to die.... I want to make sure I have done all I needed to do in this life.

And Jesus gave him the full affirmation with his words:

“among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist,”

Yes, John had done all he could, and died fully accomplishing his calling.

It is like what Jesus also said on the cross, **“It is finished!”** (John 19:30)

With this declaration, Jesus proclaims the completion of His earthly mission and the fulfillment of the Scriptures.

Jesus knew he had accomplished all he could. However, since John is not the messiah, he was asking Jesus to affirm, and Jesus did.

Dearly beloved,

I’d like to challenge you with the same question:

Do you recognize you have done all you are called to do and be in this world?

Advent is the season not only to recognize our Messiah but also, as the one following him, the copy of him, what our calling is and know we still have time to accomplish that if we need to!!

Response to the Word:

Lord God,

Inspired by John the Baptist’s faithfulness, we pray,
grant us willing hearts to accomplish the calling
You have given us.

May we, like John, prepare the way for Christ
through humility, courage, and obedience.

Give us boldness to speak truth, serve others,
and trust Your guidance—even in uncertainty.

And when our time here on earth is done, may we be able to say, I have
done all I am called to be and do.