

Advent 3A, 12-12-10

Matthew 11:2-11

Pastor Tim Koester

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--When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me."

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? What then did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces. What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. 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.' 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. --

Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up

(Preached on the morning after the first blizzard of 2010...

and if you are too young for the game show "To Tell The Truth" you won't get the title without Wikipedia ☺)

Well it appears that winter has once again arrived in Northeast NE! Despite what the calendar says, it's not fall anymore! *Real winter* doesn't have anything to do with a date on a calendar. After the first blizzard, with below zero wind chills and snow drifts blocking the road, everyone knows what season it is. (*although school kids might say it's not really winter until there's been a snow day☺*)

Sure a warm and mild winter is nice but those aren't the winters people remember.

People remember winters like last year, or like the winter of 1949.

Winter is *winter*, at least in this part of the world,

because the weather gets cold, the snow falls, and the wind blows it all around.

It's winter because we have to shovel walks,

and un-thaw livestock tanks

and pay the heating bill.

It doesn't matter what the calendar says, winter **weather has a certain character** that you recognize even if it would happen to come in July!

The same thing seems to be true about Jesus. There is a certain **character**, a specific set of conditions, **that define Jesus as the authentic savior** but John seems to be having difficulty figuring out what that **authentic** character looks like.

JOHN, OF ALL PEOPLE!

John -the camel-skin wearing, grasshopper-eating

fire and brimstone preaching prophet of God

has doubts about whether or not **Jesus** of Nazareth has the **character** of the long awaited **messiah** he and many others have been expecting.

John had a **specific picture** in mind of what that **messiah king** would look like.

He would come in **judgment**, destroying the wicked like chaff in a fire.

He would **drive out the Romans** and their pagan gods from the land

His power would **overwhelm** those who opposed him

and usher in **new era** of godliness, freedom, and righteousness.

Jesus was evidently not living up to John's expectations. John sat in prison and the "powerful one" whom John said was coming after him did not seem powerful *enough* to rescue him from King Herod. [The world had not changed](#). The Romans still ruled the land and by the time Matthew was written, they had destroyed the Jewish temple. [John wasn't the only one who had questions about this Jesus character](#). A lot of people did. A lot of people were waiting for things to change – and **we** still are. A lot of people are asking, "Is Jesus really *the one we are waiting* for or do we need to wait for someone (or something) else to deal with the difficulties of a world gone bad?"

In some ways we have come so far since the days of John. We have learned and discovered so much. The *potential* to provide dignity and wholeness to human life is larger than it has ever been **and yet...** and yet pain and suffering, despair and heartache, grief and fear continue to characterize the human experience. [If this Jesus character is so powerful](#), if he really is the son of God, [when will our waiting stop?](#) When can we expect God to act to put an end to our imprisonment, an end to our wanderings in the wilderness of heartache and selfishness?

Jesus responds to John (and to all of us) with [unexpectedness](#). Jesus tells us to **open our ears and eyes**. [Listen](#) and [look](#) around at what God is doing in the world. God has indeed come to save, just as the prophets of old said, but not in the way we might think. God has come to judge the world - but the [judgment fell upon Jesus](#), not upon those of us who deserved it, and the signs of this grace are all around us.

The character of Jesus as the true and **authentic** revelation of God will almost always look different from our idea of who Jesus should be, but the Spirit of the Living God reminds us of what is important: the blind receive sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor are brought good news. [Every attempt by death to triumph over life is taken into the very body of Christ](#) on the cross and the inevitable result is **resurrection**. The timetable may not be to our liking but you can trust in the ultimate outcome: [God will restore creation](#) and turn the wilderness into an oasis, the likes of which we cannot even imagine.

So now the challenge: How can we know God is in this place now? How can others see God at work among us? For starters, we have the [means of grace](#). We have this [bath](#), this real sign of God's promise to join us to the death and resurrection of Jesus so that nothing can ever separate us from God's love.

And we have this [meal](#), a sure and certain promise of God's nourishment for our lives, a thanksgiving for God's forgiveness and healing, and a power to join us to one another as the body of Christ for the world.

And we have something else. We have **God's Spirit** of life spilling, spewing, splashing out of our lives. By that miraculous power, [we are given the ability to live differently](#) than those who have no hope. In the second reading today, James reminds us that **grumbling against one another has no place among us** (5:9). Difference of opinion can be openly and safely discussed [without fear of them becoming coffee shop gossip](#), which is sinfully destructive to the good work of God is doing among us.

In the body of Christ people have **value** because they are **reborn as children of God**, **not** because of money, position, or power; **not** because they have family connections, **or** because they've been around longer than anyone else. Membership in this body does **not** bring privilege but **rather empowers us love** one another and put the **needs of others ahead of our own desire to be right**.

Jesus calls John the Baptist the greatest human being and yet with God's Spirit among us, even the smallest, **even the youngest of babies, is greater than that prophet**, because the Spirit of the Risen Christ lives within them. **The character of Christ**, the attributes that make God's love recognizable in the world, **cannot be captured in any of the conventional ways**. A picture in a window, a statue on an altar, or an image projected on a screen, **all fall far short** of depicting the authentic Jesus.

God has instead chosen to reveal the true and **authentic** picture of **Jesus** through **our witness to the world!** *I have heard it said, that "our lives are the only bible some people are going to read."* As we are washed in these merciful waters and fed with this gracious food, God molds us more and more into the image of Christ. Even though we remain sinful people, the blood of Jesus redeems us to confess our sins, **make peace with one another**, and live in new ways. The greatest among us is the one who is least and the first among us is the servant of all.

God's kingdom, the one that comes to us through faith,
comes from heavn above.

*God's rule is peace and freedom, and justice truth and love.
So let our praise be sounding for kindness so abounding,
Hosanna to the Lord, for he fulfills God's Word.*

Jesus of Nazareth,
the son of Mary, the son of God,
the one who gave his life for the sins of the world,
is the one we are looking for.

Let us pray for **God** to continue **giving us his character** and his **love**. Amen.