

“Are You the One?” based on Matt. 11:2-11 12/12/10

When I was assigned to my previous church appointment in Hudson, Don and I had to find a home, because there was no church parsonage. One of the church members, who was a realtor, took us on a tour of about 8 homes. One was just a few steps from the church. This would be a great home, we thought, but in order to buy it we had to first sell our home—a contingency that ultimately put us out of the running for that home. Though we were disappointed, we found an even better choice. It had the perfect layout, was only 2 minutes from the church, and had air-conditioning! We knew this was *the one* and stopped looking any further. However, the owner had his own contingencies. First, he was building a new house and couldn't move out until the new one was finished, and second, he didn't want to lower his price to meet our offer. And, we still had our contingency of needing to sell our home. Finally, however, everything came together: our home sold, the seller was ready to move into his new house, and he accepted our offer on his home. The home that we knew was *the one* finally became ours.

Today in Matthew's Gospel, we hear John the Baptist asking a question that he conveys to Jesus through his own disciples: “Jesus, are you *the One* that we've been waiting for (the promised Messiah), or is it someone else that we should be waiting for?”

The season Advent is a season of waiting for the coming of the Savior. But it's also a season of preparation, as we are busy attending to many things like--decorations, food, Christmas cards, family visits, Christmas programs, special services, caroling events and more--all in the hopes that something special will happen in our lives in all of this. But in this time of preparation, we may find ourselves asking questions like: Is this the best menu for Christmas Eve dinner or should I prepare a different one? Is this the right gift, or should I go look for something else? Is this upcoming party the one I was waiting for, or is it one yet to come? Is the time I was planning to spend with my family, the time I was really waiting for, or was I waiting for something else?

In the back of our minds we recognize that we have expectations in regard to this season and perhaps even the concern that our expectations won't be fulfilled. That what we are waiting for, what we are hoping to find and enjoy, won't show up, won't happen.

This is what John the Baptist was coming face to face with in his own faith journey. Earlier in Matthew's Gospel, we hear John speaking boldly. First, he announced to the people that the Lord was coming. Then he proclaimed that repentance was the order of the day--that in order for people to be ready for the coming Lord, they needed to change their ways. And further, when the religious leaders came to John for baptism, he addressed them with very strong language, in the words of Peterson's translation: “You brood of snakes! Do you think a little water on your snake skins is going to make any difference? It's your life that must change, not your skin! ... Is (your life) green and blossoming? --Because if it's deadwood, it goes into the fire.”

Then John gives an equally bold description of how he envisions the coming Messiah. He says (again from Peterson's translation): I'm baptizing you here in the river... (But) The real action comes next—with the main character, Jesus. He will ignite the kingdom life within you, a fire within you, the Holy Spirit within you, changing you from the inside out.... He'll place everything true in its proper place before God; (and) everything false he'll put out with the trash to be burned.”

But in today's Gospel we see John challenged by a new set of circumstances. He's in prison, because he had publicly spoken out against King Herod for luring his

brother's wife away from him, and marrying her after divorcing his own wife. Faced with the likelihood of death, John needs to be assured of who Jesus is, because Jesus didn't seem to be fulfilling the description of the Coming One that he had proclaimed so boldly. In reality, John had preached about what the coming of the Lord would be like from his own understanding of the OT Scriptures. But Jesus came in a way and ministered in a way that John didn't expect. So John asks: **"Are you the One, then, that we have been waiting for, and should receive as the promised Messiah?"**

Jesus says to John's disciples. "Let your eyes and ears give you the proof you're looking for. Notice where new life is happening, and where people's lives are being transformed: For those who were blind to the truth about God and themselves, can now see and understand it; those who weren't strong enough to stay on the right path are strengthened to do that; those whose lives have been overpowered by sin, have been cleansed of their sins and healed; those who were unable to hear the voice of conscience and of God are able to hear it now; some who had given up on themselves, now live in hope; and even those who are poor are able to receive the riches of God's love."

Then Jesus turns to the crowds and publicly affirms John and his ministry. He points to John's strength of character and his wholehearted commitment to his ministry of preparing the way for Jesus. John was a man of integrity, who was now in prison because he was holding people accountable for their lives as God's people.

Jesus' final statement in our lesson today is that **"the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than John."** What does this mean? It means that John the Baptist, as schooled as he was in the Old Testament Scriptures--and knowing well God's holiness and justice--had not seen and would not see the great love of God through the Passion and Cross of Jesus, because John's death took place before the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus. *But we've seen it!* All of us who have lived after the time of Jesus on earth have seen the great love of God in Jesus in a special way.

In truth, Jesus came into the world not to condemn it, but to save it. He didn't come with threats of violence; but rather to transform our hearts and our lives through love—love that is undeserved, radical, and everlasting. He came to all, to those who knew they needed him and to those who didn't think they did. And Jesus says: **"When I come into the world and live in the hearts of people, expect to see and hear about lives being turned around and changed."** For the truth is that when Jesus lives in our hearts, our lives continue to be transformed to become more like Jesus. *Is Jesus changing your life?*

In this season of Advent, we claim Jesus as the One for whom we have been waiting. He became flesh and lived among us, so that through his love, all people would be saved and receive new life. Amen.