

Advent III, December 11, 2016
Go and tell John
Isaiah 35:1-10
Luke 1:46-56
James 5:7-10
Matthew 11:2-11
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Fellow Ministers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ,
Gracia y paz de dios del Padre, Hijo, y Espíritu Santo

Grace to you and peace from God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
Are you the one? Or should we wait for someone else?

Two weeks! Just 14 days until Christmas!
What is left on your to-do list? Baking? Cleaning? Decorating? Shopping?
How many times have you heard . . . or asked . . . are you ready for Christmas?

December is the season of waiting and preparing.
Children endure the long month of waiting for the presents to arrive under the tree. Adults spend hours scouring the stores to find just the perfect gift for everyone. Households prepare for parties and family gatherings. And, for far too many, it is a month spent just wishing it all would be over. A season of sadness, depression and struggle.

In our Christian tradition December is also a month of preparing, but in a different way.
Counter to the commercial preparation for Christmas, we wait, not for bangles and baubles but for something less shiny. While the world is breathlessly rushing through the month grabbing for the best bargain, the latest gadget, the most stylish attire, we sit quietly asking “are you the one? Or are we to wait for another?”

We are not so different from John the Baptizer and his followers.
They had historic records to tell them that Jesus IS the one they were waiting for, yet not all the Jews recognized Jesus as THE ONE. Some thought John the Baptizer might be THE ONE. Last week we met John crying out in the wilderness: “Prepare the way of the Lord”.
When he met Jesus on the bank of the river Jordan, he hesitated to baptize Jesus, saying he was not worthy to baptize THE ONE.

The two prophets went different directions after that.
John, presumably went on teaching that Jesus was THE ONE.
Jesus went about giving sight to the blind, making the lame walk, cleansing lepers, opening the ears of the deaf, raising the dead and telling good news to the poor.

John was arrested by Herod Antipas and thrown in prison where he would eventually be executed.

So, his question today is a surprising one.

From prison, John has heard all the wonderful things Jesus is doing, the man whose sandals he proclaimed unworthy to hold.

He baptized Jesus.

He saw the image like a dove descend from heaven.

He heard the voice from the clouds name Jesus "my Son, my beloved".

Yet, he seeks confirmation that Jesus IS the one who is to come.

He asks, "should we wait for another".

What has triggered John's doubt?

Maybe, from his vantage point in a Roman prison He has doubts about this kingdom of heaven idea.

If God is truly come near, why hasn't the Empire been overthrown?

This Jesus who was to come with power and might, according to the ancient prophets, seems like kind of a whimp. He seems uninterested in overthrowing the Empire.

Why is he spending his time curing illnesses, raising the dead, proclaiming good news to the poor?

That's all fine! Lots of prophets have done that in the past.

What makes Jesus so special? How do we know that Jesus is the one? Why do wait, year after year for the one who is to come?

In the 21st century, as in the 1st century, people relate to Jesus in a variety of ways.

To some Jesus is Savior. A Liberator. A Teacher. Prophet. God in the flesh.

Some think of Jesus as a historical figure. A symbol. A myth.

Some use the name of Jesus as a swear word.

Theologians write and debate about who Jesus is.

Preachers and evangelists call people to follow him.

People just like us gather to worship him, praise him and give him thanks.

Still others, with John the Baptist, ask, "Are you really the One?"

I have spent my whole life as a believer. Recently I have come to understand why people ask about Jesus

"are you the one?" If Jesus is the one, How is it possible that the world continues to be such a mess?

The older I get the more discouraged I become about the lack of compassion, justice and peace in the world.

If the kingdom of heaven really had or has come near why is Dylan Roof on trial for massacring nine black Christians while they studied the word of God? Why are men, women AND children dying in the Mediterranean Sea to escape their ravaged homelands? If the kingdom of heaven really had or has come near why are thousands of families living in their cars in spite of being employed full time? Why are children going to bed hungry ANYWHERE?

Scripture tells us that the kingdom of heaven HAS come near. Sometimes I have doubts, like John. Yet, I keep coming back to this truth: Jesus is the One who fully embodies the God of steadfast and enduring love. The God who created and sustains us and the whole creation.

Jesus invites us to live IN that love and to live OUT that love every day. Jesus' answer to the question "Are you the one?" tells us what we need to know about the kingdom of heaven.

You want to know what the kingdom of heaven is about? Observe Jesus' acts of compassion, healing, mercy, forgiveness and welcome. Looking beyond his ministry we see how, in love Jesus died on a cross at the hands of all human hatred, brokenness, suffering, sorrow, depression, cruelty and violence.

Looking beyond his death we see how God raised him up three days later, proving that God's steadfast and enduring love is stronger even than death. Proving that the kingdom of God has come near.

So, who is it we await? For whom do we prepare the way?
This Jesus IS the one we are waiting for . . . today!
There is no other!

Thanks be to God