

“John, Again” | Rev. Tim Frickenschmidt | December 15, 2019

Isaiah 35:8

And a highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Way of Holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it. It shall belong to those who walk on the way; even if they are fools, they shall not go astray...

Matthew 11:2-6, 11

Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?” And Jesus answered them, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.” Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

James 5:7, 9b

Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains...behold, the Judge is standing at the door.

Intro Question

How do we rejoice during advent when, at times, Jesus' life and future coming seem of little impact to us? How do we wait on Jesus as if dawn is breaking and a new day is about to begin?

Background

Isaiah prophesied that the ransomed of the LORD would return to the city of God on a Highway of Holiness. John the Baptizer proclaimed a message like one shouting in the wilderness. He cried out that God's kingdom is immanent—it's just outside the door, about to enter—therefore, turn from your own path to God's Highway. Not long after he baptized his cousin, John was thrown in prison and eventually murdered. But before that Jesus sends word to his imprisoned kin, “...lepers are cleansed, the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them.”

Discuss:

1.) John's Message

Everyone heard John's message, it was loud and different. “The axe is laid at the root of the tree,” he said that we all need change. John the Baptizer was the last prophet in the tradition of the Old Testament who called God's people to account. He clearly identifies with Isaiah as one who knows the greatest need of God's people is the Lamb of God who will take away the sin of the world. His message shouted to the deaf and, like Flannery O'Conner says, “Drew a large and startling figure.” John's message of Jesus as the Lamb who will baptize with the Spirit shouted the idea that God's kingdom is at hand.

2.) John's question from prison

So what resulted? John was thrown in prison, killed, and Jesus was falsely accused into crucifixion. Is God ruling? Are the holy ones really returning to Zion? Should we wait for another anointed one of God? John's left to wonder because Jesus doesn't seem to be matching the message particularly as John finds himself in prison.

3.) Jesus' scandal

“What did you expect to see?” Jesus asks. Violence. The scandal of Jesus is that he suffers violence. Jesus vindicates his cousin as the prophet of prophets to the listening and curious crowd. Yet he takes it a step further and says that the least in the kingdom is as great as he! So who's in the kingdom? Jesus marker of the kingdom, his self-identifier, is this: The one who suffers violence (Son of Man, Servant of the Lord, the cross). Jesus own blood, his suffering violence is the marker of the kingdom. Those washed in his blood—who eat his flesh and drink his blood—are the ones who walk God's Highway.

Questions and Prayer

- 1.) What hard questions are you willing to ask Jesus to ensure that he is who he says he is?
- 2.) Discuss how you are the least in God's kingdom and at once greater than the great prophet John the Baptist.
- 3.) How is Jesus like running into a cast iron camp grill or being shot by a convict?

In Christ...Father, we are reluctant of your grace because it is violent, bloody, and disruptive. We are scared of you making us holy because we are accustomed to too little glory, too few frontiers of service, too small a Jesus. Thank you that you are slow to anger and abounding in love and faithfulness. Please grow our capacity to breath the air of your new creation, your city and so live for your glory and the good of others—a life of self-forgetfulness.

By Isaac Banegas