

Sermon

“Are You The One?”

A Sermon for First Presbyterian Church

Sunday, December 15, 2019

Third Sunday in Advent

James 5:7 Be patient, therefore, beloved, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious crop from the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. 8 You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near. 9 Beloved, do not grumble against one another, so that you may not be judged. See, the Judge is standing at the doors! 10 As an example of suffering and patience, beloved, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

Matt. 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, the lepers 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.”

Matt. 11:7 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.

I. Of all the people in the gospels John Bears Witness to Jesus as well or better than any other:

A. In John's gospel he says:

† “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” [John 1:29]

† Earlier in Matthew's gospel he says —

Matt. 3:11 “I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

† If you have noticed the 16th century plainchant piece in my study - it is this sentence from Matthew's gospel.

B. John, who was not afraid to be counter-cultural and who preached a gospel of repentance must have known he would be in trouble with the powers that be sooner or later...

† After baptizing Jesus we was arrested by Herod for speaking out about Herod's sister-in-law Herodias (his brother Phillip's wife).

† By chapter 14 of Matthew's gospel Herodias has arranged John's beheading.

C. Today's passage happens between John's arrest and his beheading.

II. It must have been a time of deep concern for John

A. He had spoken powerfully in support of Jesus.

B. He had even baptized him and witnessed that

when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. 17 And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.”

C. John was a committed supporter of this Messiah

D. And yet . . . He could not help noticing the ways Jesus was not living up to his expectations.

Matt. 11:2 When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples

† **There was something about what Jesus was doing - (or maybe *not* doing) which he found troubling... so troubling that he sends his disciples with his poignant question?**

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

III. Naturally, we wonder “What was Jesus doing that prompted John to ask this?”

A. Jesus anticipates our wonderment and perhaps John’s too because he responds to the question by pointing back to what John already knew:

“Go and tell John what you hear and see: 5 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. 6 And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me.”

B. This list of activities is not the standard list for the Messiah. The Messiah was *supposed* to be a political force to be reckoned with — someone who would oppose the occupation of the Romans and lead a revolution...

C. John is expecting Rambo and he gets Mr. Rogers

- † **Jesus is busy working redemption - but he seems to be doing it in a very personal and inefficient way . . .**
- † **He can't keep stopping what he is doing every time someone lame, or unclean cries out — at least he can keep stopping what he's doing if he is planning a military over-throw of the occupying forces.**
- † **I, of course, cannot say for sure what John saw (or didn't see) in Jesus' ministry which caused him to lose confidence — but it seems a reasonable guess that he got a different Messiah than the one he was expecting.**
- † **He might have thought, “The Messiah was supposed to make everything great again and I can't see that much has changed!”**
 - * **After all he is in prison when we probably expected to be in the Kingdom of God by then.**

IV. Which begs the question doesn't it — “What do we expect from the One who is to come?”

A. Do we expect that our Savior is going to make things easy for us? Do we want a faith which is all comfort and no challenge? Plenty of Christians want that kind of God . . .

1. But Jesus, in chapter 10 — just before today's passage he says to the disciples:

Matt. 10:34 “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.

35 For I have come to set a man against his father,

*and a daughter against her mother,
and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law;
36 and one's foes will be members of one's own household.*

B. Do we expect that our Savior will prefer the company of “good people?” Plenty of Christians seem to think that God is only interested in those who are clean and successful:

Matt. 9:10 And as he sat at dinner in the house, many tax collectors and sinners came and were sitting with him and his disciples. 11 When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?”

C. Do we expect that if we are with Jesus there will be no stormy seas in this life?

Matt. 8:23 And when he got into the boat, his disciples followed him. 24 A windstorm arose on the sea, so great that the boat was being swamped by the waves; but he was asleep. 25 And they went and woke him up, saying, “Lord, save us! We are perishing!” 26 And he said to them, “Why are you afraid, you of little faith?” Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a dead calm. 27 They were amazed, saying, “What sort of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?”

D. Presumably these are the reports about Jesus which had reached John in prison and prompted his doubts.

V. Jesus says, “what do you see?” That is how you come to know that he is the real deal.

***** Now I know that we in the upper Mid-west are not prone to a lot of self-congratulatory speech and I don't want to give us the big head . . . but:**

- A. Let me tell you what I see:**
- 1. Through the ministry of this congregation and many thousands of other churches around the world:**
 - † **Blind receive sight - Check!**
 - † **Lame walk - Check!**
 - † **Lepers cleansed - Check!**
 - † **Deaf hear - Check!**
 - † **Dead are raised - Ch.... what? Wait a minute... Well, it is undeniably true that people who would perish apart from the ministries of compassion do not perish.**
 - † **Poor have good news given to them... pastor Mary and I get to be the bearers of that good news on your behalf.**
- B. Jesus says, “What do you see happening as a result of me?” and I can say:**
- † **Homeless in FM will not sleep in the bitter-cold.**
 - † **The hungry are supplied food - I see them gathering in the boxes and bags every week.**
 - † **Thanks to our partnership with Mpangua school in Kenya — children will be fed and educated.**
 - † **Through the dental ministry oral health will be maintained in Chogoria**
 - † **Our brothers and sisters at Bdecan will be supported through the generosity of this church and others.**

- † **Our partnership with Heart & Soul Cafe is providing delicious and nutritious meals for all without reference to their capacity to pay.**
- † **Children in need will receive gifts for Christmas which grow from the generosity of people in this room.**
- † **I could go on . . .**
 - * **Adults coming to deeper discipleship through *the Pilgrimage* ...**
 - * **children and youth being nurtured through the ministries of Penny & Kayla .**
 - * **musicians whose gifts and talents are given an opportunity to glorify God . . .**
 - * **Something as simple and ordinary as maintaining this worship-space (reference woman at Sarah's recital).....**

VI. Is there yet more that we can and should do?

- A. You betcha . . . but there is simply no good explanation for the extraordinary and sacrificial generosity of this congregation and many others like it — generosity aimed not at our own glorification — but at the redemption of the world.**
- B. No better explanation than that we am many others like us have come to know this odd Messiah who refuses to fit into our stereotypes and we have felt his love and we have learned from him the blessedness of being kind and generous.**
- C. So we plant seeds of kindness and watch them grow.**