

3ADVENT2010 "HE IS THE ONE!"

Matt. 11:2-11

In Ch. 3 of Matthew's gospel, John the Baptist introduced Jesus with fiery exclamations; "His winnowing fork is in his hand and he will gather the wheat into his granary but he will burn the chaff with unquenchable fire." (vs. 12). Here, in ch. 11, John the Baptist is in prison and he sends some of his followers to Jesus with doubt-filled interrogation. "Are you the Christ or should we expect someone else?" (vs.3).

"Why did John doubt? Because in ch. 3 Jesus was mainly a figure of power, a bringer of judgment, a carrier of fire with an axe to chop down the unfruitful tree and to sift out the chaff. (3:10-12). But then Jesus comes to John like a sinner to be baptized in water. Jesus is baffling, a little strange; less messianic than John had expected and less cataclysmic than John had preached." (F.D. Brunner in Matthew Commentary, p. 408).

John was following the lead of Isaiah who prophesied, "Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the vengeance of God. He will come to save you. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened," etc.

John expected Jesus to come like a lion, throw out the Roman occupation forces and inaugurate the Kingdom of God on earth. John wanted an "Action Hero" probably like the action heroes we see in the movies today. In the movies the action hero is fearless and bold. He beats up, shoots up, blows up anything or anyone who gets in his way. In some perverse way we are drawn to this kind of action hero. This is what John expected. How does Jesus measure up to this kind of macho expectation?

Well, not very well. Jesus did not use violence but a gentle touch and a spoken word. Yet his gentle touch and spoken word had incredible power. He fed the

hungry, healed the sick, cured the blind and lame. Jesus worked mostly, not entirely, 1 on 1 behind the scenes. Jesus worked quietly. “He healed the sick, the insignificant individuals here and there but did nothing to change the basic structural problems in Israel’s life... Now John is in prison and Herod on the throne about to take John’s head. What kind of Messiah is this who works so individualistically, so piecemeal?” (Brunner p. 409) John had doubts about Jesus.

But John’s vision of the Messiah was too small. Jesus came to take on larger issues and enemies than just the liberation of Israel from the Romans. Jesus came to battle humankind’s greatest enemies, sin, death, and the power of the devil. When Jesus came in contact with that which enslaves humankind he acted. As lightning strikes a tree in the forest and splinters fly and as lightning strikes rocks and shatters them to pieces, so the word and touch of Jesus broke the power of evil that enslaved people in sickness, blindness and death. Jesus had powers men only dream of. In the tiniest tip of his finger, Jesus had more power than lightning. He touched the dead son of the widow in the little town of Nain and brought him back to life. He touched the deaf man and gave him his hearing. Jesus’ words had power. Power like no other person has ever had. He spoke with authority and with a simple word the blind received their sight, the lame walked again, the dead were raised.

And so Jesus told the disciples of John the Baptist, “go tell John what you are hearing ...” “Hearing” and “seeing” are code words in Matthew. Hearing represents the Sermon on the Mount and where Jesus spoke with authority. He said in the Sermon on the Mount, “You have heard it said...but I say unto you...” Jesus spoke with authority. “Seeing” represents the miracles Jesus performed, “go tell John what you are seeing”. The miracles of Jesus pointed to his true identity. Even today it is exposure to the word of Jesus that creates faith. St. Paul says in Romans 10:17 “Faith comes from hearing, and hearing comes from the preaching of Christ.” When you come to church and hear sermons and sing songs that lift up Jesus and tell what he has done, you feed your faith. The

sacraments are tangible things you see and “in, with and under” the forms of bread and wine the power of God’s grace and forgiveness touches you.

Jesus was the fulfillment of what the prophet Isaiah had foretold. Jesus performed the acts of the Messiah, (11:5) “The blind see, the lame walk, the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life and good news is preached to the poor..”

Note that Jesus does not berate John for his doubts. He does not say to John’s disciples...”You go tell John that if he “had enough faith” he would believe in me.” Jesus is gentle and kind. In sublime understatement he says, “Go tell John what you hear and see...the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the dead are raised, and blessed is he who takes no offense at me.” Jesus does not snuff out the dimly burning wick of faith which flickers in the dark prison where John lay chained, surrounded by the darkness of doubt. No, Jesus reminds John of what Isaiah had prophesied about the coming Messiah and that word of Jesus gave John faith, hope and courage.

“Are you the one or should we expect someone else?” The Greek word used for “someone else” means “should we expect a different kind of Messiah?” John expected a lion and Jesus came as a lamb. But no ordinary lamb. This was the Lamb of God who, by his death on the cross, takes away the sins of the world.

John the Baptist’s difficulty with Jesus is the same problem many have with Jesus to this day: Jesus does not meet our expectations for what God should be doing. And it is easy to take offense against one who claims to be the savior of the world who doesn’t act in the way we think God should act. It is easy to doubt that Jesus is the only way and think “Maybe there is another way?” And so we ask along with John the Baptist, “Are you the one who is to come or should we look for someone else?” Jesus’ word to us is still the same, “Listen to what you hear. Pay attention to what you see, and blessed is the one who takes no offense at me and the way I will bring salvation to this world.”

The way God works in Jesus is offensive. It goes against the way WE think God should work. But God HAS acted in a powerful way in Jesus to save the world. Jesus has broken the power of sinister evil that prowls the earth seeking to destroy us. Jesus has pried the grip of death off the throat of the world and promised you life and hope, peace and joy. Your sins are forgiven in Jesus and you belong to the Kingdom of Heaven.

Something qualitatively different entered history with the Advent of Jesus.

HE IS THE ONE of whom the prophets spoke.

HE IS THE ONE for whom John the Baptist prepared the way.

HE IS THE ONE in whom the kingdom of heaven has drawn near the earth.

HE IS THE ONE who gives you hope.

HE IS THE ONE who walks beside you in life.

HE IS THE ONE who is faithful when you have doubts.

HE IS THE ONE who opens your ears to hear the gospel.

HE IS THE ONE who opens your eyes to see the love of God on a cross.

HE IS THE ONE who rescues you from your bondage to sin.

HE IS THE ONE who will raise you from the dead.

HE IS THE ONE who came to you as a babe in the manger. And blessed are you who see in this baby the one who came to be your savior.

Thanks be to God! AMEN

Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, thank you for coming to rescue us from sin, death and the power of the devil. As we anticipate the celebration of Christmas protect us from faithless fears, anxiety and doubts. Fill us with faith which sees in your birth, the priceless gift of your love and the promise of our salvation. AMEN