

# "Yes! And More!"

Matthew 11:2-11

16 December, 2007 – Advent 3A

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Matthew 11:2-11

When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: 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. And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me."

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? What then did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces. What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. 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.' 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.

Prayer.

We think we've got it bad.  
The condemned waited,  
confined in misery's dungeon,  
covered with slop and disease,  
shackled with iron,  
daily tortured, beaten, and abused;  
waiting,  
waiting with anticipation  
for his capital reward  
for simply following the directives  
of a loving and benevolent God.  
Hindsight tells us  
that John didn't have long to live.

By the fourteenth chapter<sup>1</sup>  
his head would be  
separated from his body,  
served on a platter.  
We could imagine ourselves  
in his circumstances,  
attempting to make sense  
of his powerless state  
where earthly hope is  
justifiably lost,  
where the only thing left  
is the answer to the question,  
"Are you the one?"

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 14

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For John, a successful mission was equated with salvation. The angel Gabriel had established his task instructing his father before John was born, saying "With the spirit and power of Elijah he will go before him, ... to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."<sup>2</sup> Had John prepared the people for someone other than the Lord? Had he backed the right horse? I can't help but suspect that a portion of this question is rhetorical. He had seen the heavens part and heard the voice of God when he baptized Jesus. He had seen the crowds Jesus was attracting. Yet, in the isolation and punishment of prison it must have been gnawing at him refusing to let him go. Have I proved successful? Did I prepared the way for the Lord? Has my life made a difference?

For the mature person of faith these are fair questions. When considering on the one hand, the lifetime effort to bring forth God's kingdom, and on the other hand, contemplation about

the future transition from this life into life eternal, it is always appropriate to ask "have I made a difference?" More concisely the question might be thus: "Have I used the talents given me to be true to God's commands as a disciple of His Son, Jesus Christ?"

For John, the answer was Yes! Yes! and Yes! John had put to use his talents; persuading people, public speaking, prophesying, and proclaiming the coming of the Messiah. John had followed God's plan without any deviation. John's work was all about grafting his ministry onto Jesus' more central branch. He pointed his followers towards Jesus and encouraged them to follow him.

Our answer might be less emphatic. Have we used our talents to be true to God's commands as a disciple of Jesus Christ? Too often we piddle away our talents wasting time on self-gratification.

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2 Luke 1:17

Too often  
we have forgotten Christ  
and passed by on the opposite  
side of the road,  
or have failed to speak up  
when asked, like Peter,  
"do you know this man?"  
Too often we've allowed  
our faith to become  
so wishy-washy and shallow  
that we consider participation  
as voluntary.

The confines of John's imprisonment,  
the slop, the muck,  
the darkness and disease  
are a metaphor  
for our life story  
for our pathways of faith.  
We, like John,  
ask with quivering, broken confidence  
"Are you the one?"

It was not quite so clear  
in those early days in Palestine  
if Jesus was the one,  
or not.  
Others had come,  
making promises,  
whipping the crowd into a frenzy,  
only leaving them holding the bag,  
hung on a cross,  
left out to dry.  
Some,  
like the authors of  
*Psalms of Solomon*<sup>3</sup>  
believed Messiah  
was a political savior  
of the people;

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3 See the *Psalms of Solomon*, chapter 17, for a first century  
BCE perspective of Messiah.

a military leader  
who would re-establish  
the kingdom as it existed  
in the time of David.  
Others,  
hearkened back  
to the words and wisdom of Isaiah,  
especially this "little apocalypse"  
as found in chapter thirty-five:  
"Hear is your God.  
... Then the eyes of the blind  
shall be opened,  
and the ears of the deaf unstopped;  
then the lame shall leap like a deer,  
and the tongue of the speechless  
sing for joy."<sup>4</sup>  
Messiah's salvation  
was sight for the blind,  
hearing for the deaf,  
freedom of movement for the physically  
disabled,  
and voice to the previously voiceless  
that they might sing for joy!

In today's world  
our perspectives on faith  
have so narrowed;  
it is  
as if  
we find  
spiritual blinders fashionable.  
"Salvation; what's that?"  
the newbie asks.  
"That's what happens to good people  
who die and go to heaven,"  
the shallow illiterate answers,  
"Come to our church,  
we'll give you all the answers  
and every opportunity

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4 Isaiah 35:4b-6a (NRSV)

to earn your way to heaven.”

Don't  
you  
believe it.  
Not for one minute.

“Go and tell John,”  
Jesus instructs the crowd,  
“Go and tell John  
what you hear and see:  
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.”  
For John,  
the student of scripture  
would connect the dots,  
and liken Jesus' words  
with Isaiah's words.

Salvation  
is more than a ticket to heaven.  
It is corporate  
as well as personal.  
It is as communal  
as it is individual.  
Didn't God lead a people  
out of Egypt?  
Didn't God lead a people  
back from Exile in a foreign land?

The way to get to heaven  
is to work at getting our neighbors to  
heaven.

We are all set free,  
or none of us are set free.

We are all saved from  
poverty, disease, blindness, and  
deafness  
or none of us are.  
Jesus incarnate  
lifts high the social Gospel  
just as high as the cross is lifted up.

The hope and anticipation of Advent  
is not in some cataclysmic  
consummation and judgment,  
a world of earthquake, fire, and  
pestilence  
in-so-much as,  
it is when we've labored  
with our God  
to bring an end to violence and war,  
to set prisoner's free  
with acts of forgiveness and redemption,  
to feed the hungry  
to shelter the homeless  
to protect the widow  
and to provide hospitality to the  
sojourner  
traveling through our land.  
This is when Christ  
promises to return  
and all will be judged righteous.  
On that grand and glorious day  
all the gates of heaven  
will swing open wide  
that all may enter.

“Are you saved?”  
the fundamentalist asks  
after pounding on the front door.  
Of course we are.  
“Yes! and More!”  
we can cry aloud.  
Salvation is  
once was

and now is.  
It is won  
by the cross of Jesus Christ,  
and it is also won  
by laboring in the vineyard,  
building community,  
breathing life into a social Gospel,  
that all  
might be saved through Him.

Salvation is coming.  
It is a both-and proposition.  
He is coming as king  
and he is coming to save his people.  
He is coming to save his people,  
as he is coming to save you.  
He is coming to save you  
and He is coming  
to be our eternal king.  
Salvation awaits!  
Can you feel the anticipation?

Amen.