

Christ Church 3rd Sunday of Advent 2019– Year A

Matthew 11:2-11

Sermon

In this last week or so the Christmas concerts and carol services have got into full swing... gathering people from all walks of life, children, adults, rich, poor, those with little to hope for and those with much to celebrate in. People of different faiths, people of no faith...people with different expectations of Christmas. A challenging task to find the right mix, for inviting people to engage in the Christmas Story... with stars, angels, shepherds... perhaps a frosty snowman, a winter wonderland some familiar carols...some bells, some prayers some loss, some light, some tidings of comfort and of joy.

For me...I am up for the challenge to invite people, into the true spirit of Christmas and ask the question...What is real about Jesus for us today?

For as much, as we were able, at the services, to consider... the gift of Jesus, God with us...and consider the gift Jesus might want us to have at this time of year – there is also a sense of the tension of knowing that some of the people there, were probably wrestling with some really hard circumstances of life...just like me and you.

Illness, loss, economic difficulty, or depression... sometimes a sense of failure or an inability to live up to the expectations of others, or of self. Set those troubles against a culture of seasonal perfection... of having a lovely Christmas, the trauma we hear of in the world...

And the ingredients have been assembled for a recipe of doubt and disillusion. A beautiful carol service might lift our spirits for a little while... but sighs of hopelessness, doubts and questions...especially about God...might return far more quickly than they left...

If it makes you and me feel any better, John the Baptist seems to have similar doubts and questions...in our gospel reading this morning.

Jesus doesn't give him a straight answer. He tells John's disciples to report on what is happening around Jesus. They are to say that "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".

Jesus knows that John will understand that message. He will recognise the prophecy of Isaiah about the Messiah, the chosen one of God. He will therefore understand who Jesus really is and be reassured and strengthened.

To be fair, John's failure of confidence shouldn't really surprise us. He is, after all, in prison and, so far, what he predicted and longed for has just not really arrived, or perhaps not in the way he imagined it!

For when John announced the coming of God's kingdom and proclaimed Jesus as God's anointed... he expected the world that he lived in to change. John, would have expected that Jesus would transform life for people, for good, forever and right now!

This is much like the expectation of people today...if faith produced instant results...we might follow...but we need to look at where light IS breaking through into the darkness, where Good news is found even if it is not how we expect or want it to happen, in our lives, in the life of the world and in the lives of those around us...

Jesus had to point out the signs of Good News to John the Baptist...

I wonder where the Good News signs around us, are today?

At advent, we are perhaps more like John the Baptist than we might at first imagine... for we too are invited to watch, to witness, to wait... and to see...

John of course in prison...could not witness to the work of Jesus, in the lives of others... in the way that he had before...his calling and ministry in that sense had come to an end...no

But like John... Jesus calls us all to look beyond the struggles and challenges, of our day to look through our circumstances, in order to see what we've been missing.

If we have felt a personal blow this year, we should look at those people and events that have brought us hope and peace.

If we have felt a political blow, we are to look at the records of history to the people who've worked for justice and have seen success as well as setback.

If we are simply down because of the season, and the lack of faith in others... we must seek out and share stories of hope and find ways to center ourselves in peace.

At advent we are invited to watch, to witness... to wait and to see...

God doesn't mind our doubt... but he doesn't want us to give up! Despite appearances, the work of God's Kingdom is always on the move.

I'd like to think that Jesus words...were heard by John as an encouragement... more of a... Go back and tell my cousin that things move in fits and starts, but there are always signs of hope. While he's in prison, the effects of his labors continue. Even if he feels hopeless, there is hope among the people he told and touched, hearts are being transformed... and people are slowly turning towards God...

And so while Matthew's portrayal of John and his doubts is surprising, striking, and even startling, maybe it's not so odd to hear about during this 3rd week of advent...as the world races towards Christmas. When we, too, at times, feel stuck between God's promises made and God's promises kept...

When we, too, at times, know ourselves to live in between Christ's first coming at Bethlehem and his second in glory; when we, too, at times, are disappointed by ourselves, the world, and even God...when we find ourselves whispering a prayer as desperate as it is ancient and simple: O Come, Lord Jesus, come.

At those moments, we know that whatever our misgivings, whatever our disappointments, God is not disappointed in us, or those who do not yet have faith in him... and comes to us anyway, eager to join us in our weakness, to hold onto us in our insecurity, and to comfort us in our fear.

For God in Jesus, came to us not as a mighty warrior, John the Baptist, was born to break through the hard ground, so that the light that was coming into the world could shine through... into the brokenness of the world... hearts ready to hear the love of God in Jesus...whose name shall be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace...

