

Advent III

1 Corinthians 4: 1-5 & Matthew 11: 2-10

We see throughout our nation and in the world the flat-out rejection of truth rooted in God's love which alone can bring freedom, reconciliation, healing, and lasting peace. Any hope for a real change must start with a proper formation of consciousness bringing hearts and minds to Christ. It was into this world, suffering from so much confusion, terror, chaos, and violence, that God sent the Only Begotten Son to give a powerful witness to the truth of His unconditional love for us all.

John the Baptist knew all this. He knew that Jesus Christ would come to fulfill the promises that God made to his people by the mouth of his prophets.

He preached without fear that the people of his generation should prepare themselves to welcome the Savior of the world. And that required them to receive the baptism of repentance. He also knew very well what he was talking about: someone more powerful than he was coming. He even baptized Jesus in the Jordan River where, for the first time, he heard the voice of God declare, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

But here he is in jail, a place where there is no hope, a place where everything shuts down on him; no more vision for tomorrow; a place of distress and great grief; a place where his freedom is taken away from him, all movement limited within the four walls of his cell. He is between life and death, and his future depends on the king. There is no way out! He is done, his mouth is shut; no more preaching, no more saying things that "offend people;" he is trapped, and he is finished! The one he testified about saying, "He must increase, I must decrease" (John 3: 30) is now in town doing mighty things, and "everyone is going to him" (John 3: 26). And he may be asking himself, "What about me?" or "when will he take her of me?"

That's when a very loaded question came to his mind:

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

It's a question that comes up for most of us eventually. We're doing the best we can, living as faithfully as we know how. Some of us may do so better than others or at least appear to, but the truth is that we want to be good children, siblings, parents, church members, and friends. Most of us try so hard to make the world a better place. We want to help those less fortunate than us and contribute to the betterment of society. We want to embrace the notion that the best is yet to

come. For many of us, our faith helps us make sense of how to do that, both in the ways that it becomes a rule of life and in the ways that it offers comfort and relief along the way.

We may escape the jail time that John the Baptist endured, but many of us will endure the less visible imprisonment of abuse, addiction, depression, and despair. And sooner or later, our world---the place we try to hide ---will be invaded by stress, disease and death, accidents, and disasters that simply don't make sense. The world can be a very scary place. At some point, even the most faithful among us find ourselves doubting and questioning, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?"

It's a question to ask on this third Sunday of Advent. Traditionally, this Sunday is known as Gaudete Sunday, *Gaudete* being Latin for rejoicing. It marks the turning point of the season when we focus less on preparing ourselves to be worthy of the incarnate Christ and rejoice more in the promise that he will come again. Often such rejoicing requires some intention on our part: we don't just receive joy; we have to cultivate it, to look for it, to practice it.

We practice by reminding ourselves that we are looking for how God is at work in the world now toward fulfilling God's greater promise for all time.

In answer to John's question, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" Jesus reminds the disciples to show John some light, to tell him what they hear and see: that in the darkness of Herod, 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. In the darkness of Herod, Jesus, and the disciples invite John to see that God is at work in the world.

That's why believers need to rejoice.

Advent reminds us to do the same. It is easy to be sure that Jesus is the one when everything is going well, and blessings seem abundantly clear. It is much harder when darkness descends. So, practice. Practice being and seeing the light, for yourself and those who can't see through the darkness themselves. Jesus indeed is the one who is to come. Rejoice!

Prayer

Lord Jesus, You sent to us John the Baptist to preach repentance and to call us to Yourself. Open our minds and hearts, dear Lord, to the message John spoke and help us to heed his words more fully to share in the greatness of life to which we are called. Help us to begin this

process here and now so that we can begin to experience the joy and freedom you have in store for us. Amen!