

Sermon: Advent 6

The Rev. Kim Hoop

December 11, 2016

Year A

Isaiah 35:1-10

Psalm 146:4-9

James 5:7-10

Matthew 11:2-11

Are you the one who is to come or are we to wait for another? This question was sent to Jesus from John the Baptist at the time he was imprisoned by Herod at Machaerus, east of the Dead Sea. John had confronted Herod about his unlawful marriage to his brother's wife and things did not go well for John. Herod was a part of the Roman machine that ruled with absolute power and quickly squelched dissent among those in the population they dominated. The people at that time were severely oppressed, most lived in poverty under Roman rule and life was in general, difficult.

John, as a prophet, had preached repentance, baptized people in the Jordan, and proclaimed the coming of one, Jesus, whose sandals he was unworthy to untie. John was actually the one to baptize Jesus, he received God's confirmation that Jesus was God's son, and was aware of Jesus's power to heal, to make the lame walk, the deaf to hear and had the power to raise the dead... God's power.

And, his recognition of Christ began early on, as you may recall, he leapt in his mother's womb at the sound of Mary's voice. So it seems likely that in his heart, John knew that Jesus was the one. So why the question?

John had, as we all do, doubts. We doubt what others say, we doubt what we see and hear and we doubt our own abilities. Many years ago I worked at a clinic that offered HIV testing, along with pre- and post-test counseling for patients. I doubted my ability to have the "right" thing to say when post-test counseling patients who were HIV positive. The impact of a positive test result was life altering for our patients and although we made referrals for continuing care, I felt it was so very important to have just the right thing to say at the post-test session.

There may have been many reasons why John questioned: John may just have wanted confirmation from Jesus ... yes, what you know and have seen is real, and I am the one, giving John a sense of peace and perhaps some hope as he sat in prison.

John may also have felt abandoned and afraid. Would Jesus (the Messiah) that he proclaimed not use his power to free John and set Herod straight? Or John may have been concerned that Jesus's ministry was going in an off course direction. Perhaps John along with many others may have expected Jesus to use his power to overthrow Roman rule, free the people and create a new, just world during his lifetime.

Or perhaps John was trying to clarify his own role, now going from prophet (the greatest of the prophets) to a disciple. Was he now to shift gears and go from proclaiming Christ to following him. John had said that Jesus must increase and he (John) must decrease, was now the time? Jesus responds by telling John's disciples — tell John what you hear and see, the lame walk, the deaf hear, the blind see, the lepers are cleansed, the poor receive good news and the dead are raised. In other words, yes John, I am the one.

John, did not have to wait for another. But, he as well as all of us today, have to wait for God to act in his time. Certain things must take place first, and Jesus knew this. Just like in our reading from James, farmers must wait for the crops to receive rain. That must take place before the crops will grow. And patiently waiting is the theme of Advent.

We are waiting for the return of Christ, then there will be a new world. It is difficult to be patient, and yet it is required of us daily in many things. Being patient with our families, children, co workers. Being patient with ourselves as we learn something new. And being patient with circumstances, like being stuck in traffic or finding out that we are 15th in line at the grocery store. To cultivate this kind of patience is a good thing. But patience can have a negative side. We must be careful that we do not offer patience to systems that hurt others. Systems that create division and oppress or marginalize others. Systems that widen the gap between the rich and the poor. Systems that allow

for discrimination where people are are treated unfairly because of gender, sexual orientation, skin color or nationality, or where people are denied basic human rights. these types of systems hurt and diminish all of us. Waiting patiently for these to go away or change on their own is not likely to work.

Perhaps there is a call to persevere in building up Gods kingdom, here and now, striving for justice, love and peace until Christ does return again. In his time he will return and make all things new, fair and just for all people. It is important now to care for the poor, reach out to the marginalized, feed the hungry and care for one another. Let's strive for justice for all people. Because we too, know in our hearts that he is the one, and like John, we don't have to wait for another.

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