

Matthew 11:2-11

²When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples ³and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" ⁴Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: ⁵the 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. ⁶And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me."

⁷As 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? ⁸What then did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces. ⁹What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. ¹⁰This is the one about whom it is written,

'See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way before you.'

¹¹Truly 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.

Matthew 11:2-11, 2016

This passage standing all alone seems to be a mere capsule, a side story of the things that are going on with some of the earlier characters in the larger story.

Last week we heard that story of John the Baptist preparing the way for the Lord, the Messiah. He was proclaiming the kingdom of heaven has come near.

John was confident in his preaching and all his work. He even baptized Jesus.

And he knew that Jesus was the one. In fact John would not have baptized Jesus had Jesus allowed it.

He said, Jesus you need to baptize me not the other way around.

But he finally consented, and John saw the heavens open up and the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and alighting on Jesus.

John knew.

Now though, John isn't so sure.

Jesus, are you the one?

He sends his own disciples to Jesus with the question.

Does this have something to do with John now being in prison?
Does it have something to do with John's expectations not being met?

What did he expect?

He has gone from confidence to disappointment, anticipation to desperation, from hope to wondering,

Jesus, are you the one?

After his conversation with John's disciples Jesus even asks the crowds,

“What did you expect, a reed shaken by the wind, someone dressed in soft robes, a prophet?

A prophet you saw, for sure, in his camel hair cloths, a leather belt around his waist, eating his gourmet grasshoppers and wild honey.

Is that what you expected?

John now suffers from doubt; doubt that likely comes out of his own situation.

He is in prison and that was not a fun place to be.

In fact while he was in prison he would face his own death finally.

So Jesus, what is this all about? How are you saving the world, and more to the point how are you saving ME!?

It might be helpful to hear about John's doubt during this time of the year, a time that is suppose to filled with tidings of comfort and joy,

because for some there will be none, and for others it will be overshadowed with grief, anger, resentment, regret, depression, isolation or some other mix of emotions.

There is a growing acknowledgement of this phenomenon called “Blue Christmas” these days.

In fact I have learned there are “Blue Christmas” services offered that provide a safe place for people to name their pain and tell their stories –

or to be a compassionate presence for those who are blue during this time of year.

This gives people the opportunity and permission to be transparent and authentic about how they really experience the holidays.

Barbara Lazear Ascher shares her story of a life changing event when she was a sophomore in college.

She was part of a small group of close friends who lived in the same dorm. One night a few days before Halloween some of them were going to a popular place for a late night snack and coffee when their car was hit by a car that ran a red light. All but one survived the crash with a few abrasions. Her friend Greg was thrown through the windshield suffering massive trauma.

Greg was in a coma until shortly before Christmas. She remembers when they got the news of his awakening sitting with her friends in a dark alcove of the college’s dining hall. They looked out at the rest of the brightly lit Dining Hall, decorated for the holidays. Everyone seemed so

animated, happy, and carefree. Their loud, jovial conversations were such a stark contrast to the somber mood of Barbara and her friends. Holiday music was playing in the background, but none of them were particularly, “Merry and bright.”

That whole scene was so different from when the shock spread through the whole school in the aftermath of Greg’s injuries.

Barbara knew she had much to be grateful for, but there was also an accompanying sense of sadness as she lived with the loss of Greg’s presence,

and the reminder of how Greg’s life was changed.

Some of you may be covered by the shadow of loss, grief, depression, anger, or some other mix of emotions.

You may have doubt about your faith, or doubt God’s presence.

How many of you have lost a loved one who you especially miss during the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays?

Sharon Hinton lost her sister Carol on Thursday.

Others of you have lost loved ones, had health difficulties this year,

challenges and changes in your life you thought you would never happen.

The issues can be relational, financial, meeting the needs of life.

Doubt is what can accompany those other mixed emotions especially during this season of the year when we talk about, when we sing about,

and expect comfort and joy, days that are merry and bright.

I want you to hear today, that if you suffer these things you are not alone.

There are others who feel just the way you do,

and there are yet others who have a compassion for you that can be life giving when you open up to them,

when you allow them to care for you.

Perhaps next year we should have our own “Blue Christmas” service.

For us who live in this shadow as we approach Christmas, just as it was for John while living in the shadow of his imprisonment and hearing about what Jesus is doing,

the question that comes out of the doubt,

“Jesus are you the one?” may be more a plea for understanding and reassurance in a difficult situation than a wavering in belief and /2/*+++++trust in God’s presence.

So, perhaps today we bring our deep concerns and prayers before God,

confident that God will hear and answer them, provide the healing we need,

the confidence to live in his grace, believe in his Son
as the Messiah,

that the kingdom of heaven has come near,

and give us the strength and confidence then
to go out to where our faith changes the
lives of those around us;

the places where God calls us to work, struggle and care,
offering through our words and deeds

the healing and peace, the comfort and joy, days that
are merry and bright

that come from the God we know as Jesus.