

Third Sunday of Advent  
First Trinity Lutheran Church  
December 16, 2007  
Matthew 11:2-11

### **Are You the One to Come?**

**"Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?"** If you look around does this look like a world in which Messiah has come? As I look around, I have to admit that the world doesn't look all that redeemed. In our Gospel reading today John the Baptist had his doubts. If this Jesus was the promised Savior, what was John doing in prison? How come he didn't stage a rescue? John sent his friends to ask: "Um, excuse us, sir, but are you the one who is to come?"

**"Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?"** Let's be honest, this Advent, and ask ourselves: are we happy with the Savior we got, or are we really looking for something better? I don't know about you, but I have my doubts some days. This world really doesn't look redeemed. The world we live in is fascinated by, enslaved by what theologian Walter Wink calls "the myth of redemptive violence." That's the idea that if we hit back hard enough, we can conquer any evil that comes at us. We if we aren't born thinking that way, we learn to very soon. Maybe that's part our original sin. Toddlers have very solid ideas of what's fair and what's unfair, they learn very quickly how to use their fists and their feet and their toys to make things "right," and as we get older we find more refined ways to put the world "right" in our own eyes through physical and verbal and spiritual violence. "The squeaky wheel gets the grease," we say, and "nice guys finish last." It's all about getting our own way which we are always sure is the best way-by doing whatever it takes: redemptive violence. At the extreme, we "solve" the problem by snuffing out the person who seems to be the cause of the trouble.

Jesus didn't operate that way. He lived for the sake of those who needed him, and knew they needed him, whether they were loud about it, like the blind man shouting "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" or quiet about it, like Zacchaeus up the tree, or the woman who

touched the hem of his garment. When evil approached him, he looked it in the eye and named it for what it was, but he didn't strike out or resist when he was bound and led away to be mocked, and beaten, and crucified. How ironic, then, when people who claim to be his followers go off on crusades, with "God wills it!" The world is out of joint, but we'll fix it, by golly!

So no, I don't think we are satisfied with the Savior we got. We are looking for someone who "will come with vengeance. " That is who "will come and save us?" And if God would just come down and get rid of the bad people if God would just exercise some redemptive violence, we could look around and see a redeemed world. Right?

But that's not the way it is. We have a Savior who comes not in lightning and thunder, not in a war chariot or a tank or a Stealth bomber, but in diapers and born to a family of refugees. We have a Savior who didn't condemn, but instead was condemned, who died an outcast, alone, branded a criminal, the victim rather than the doer of redemptive violence. We have a Savior who is risen and lives among us in silence and in service, who begs of us the use of our hands and hearts and voices so that He may continue to save the world. We have a Savior who asks us to be church, the people called, so that salvation may indeed reign in this unredeemed-looking world.

**"Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?"** The older I get, the more I realize that we all have second thoughts. We all have moments of doubting and questioning. A high school graduate might pray for a high paying job right out of school. But six months later, the only companies hiring are McDonalds and Taco Bell. And the person says, "God, I thought life after high school would go a lot easier than this. This is not what I expected at all. Are you really looking out for me? Are you even there?"

Or a woman discovers that her husband has been having an affair. They get a divorce. All of a sudden, she's a single mom with two kids. And she says, "God, I never thought in a million years that I would be in this situation. I've been a good practicing Christian my whole life. How

could this happen to me? Are you the One who was to come? Or should we look for another?"

Or a couple in there fifties discovers that their pension has been mismanaged. They're not going to be able to retire as they planned. They're going to have to keep working. And they wonder where Christ is in all this. **"Are you the One who was to come, or should we expect someone else?"**

We've all had times where we expected God to do something special in our lives. If he didn't come through exactly the way we thought He would, we wonder, **"Are you really the One who was to come? Or should we look for someone else?"**

I think we can appreciate where John is coming from when he asked this question. He didn't think he would end up in prison all by himself. He expected Jesus to come and punish the Herods of this world. He remembered the prophecy in Isaiah 11:4 where it says that the Messiah would strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked. He remembered the prophecy in Isaiah 61:2 where it says that God's anointed one would proclaim 'the day of vengeance of our God.' He even said in Matthew 3:12 that Jesus would "gather the wheat into his barn, but burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." He was expecting a fire and brimstone Jesus. "Why is Jesus letting the Herods of this world get away with murder? Why is he letting an innocent man like me sit here in this prison? Why is He letting my life come to an end like this? **Are you the One who was to come? Or should we expect someone else?"**

One thing I learn from this passage is that it's OK to ask God questions. It's OK to say, "Lord, sometimes my heart and mind can't understand, what's in your will, what's in your plan. Help me to understand why things are happening the way that they are."

Another thing I learn from this story is that Jesus sometimes answers our questions! Beginning with verse four, He says, ""Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor." In other words, if you want to know whether

or not I am the long awaited Messiah, then take a look at my track record! Look at the people I've helped! Look at the people I've healed! Look at the people whose lives have been changed for the better!

The greatest evidence that Jesus is who He says He is comes from the changed lives of His followers. Jesus was not the Messiah that John the Baptist expected. He was a better Messiah than John the Baptist expected!

This raises an important question for us today. What kind of Christ do you and I expect? What does your Christ look like? Is he a liberator or stern judge? Is he a distant, untouchable divine Son of God, or is he a personal, intimate Savior?

Sometimes, we form ideas about Jesus that are not true. We sometimes think of Him as strictly a wish granter: If I'm good, Christ will help me get a good job. Christ will help me get a new car. Christ will help me find a date for Friday night.

Well that kind of image of Christ is dangerous, because what happens when our wishes DON'T get granted? What happens when Christ doesn't come up with a date for you this Friday night?

"Are you the one, or should we expect someone else?" Sometimes it's good for us to doubt the image we have of Christ, because the image we have might not be the right one. Maybe it is time for you to have some good healthy second thoughts about Jesus. How do you think of Jesus? Do you think of Him as demanding and overbearing, full of thou shalt do this but thou shalt not do that? If so, then you need to have some second thoughts about that Jesus, because Jesus said in Matthew 11:28-30, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Or maybe you think of Jesus as one who is distant and unconcerned with what happens to us. If so, then you need to have some second thoughts about that Jesus. The Bible says in

Matthew 28:20, "I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Can we take time, what's left of this Advent, to consider this question? "Are you the one, or should we expect someone else?" Jesus Christ was and is the one who his Father called him to be from before time began. He is indeed the one who was to come as the scripture foretold and he always will be: not the Savior we would have fashioned for ourselves, but the genuine article, the real thing. Jesus has come and we don't have to wait for another.