



Advent 3, Year A

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The Third Sunday of Advent: Gospel Text – Matthew 11:2-11

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, those with a skin disease 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.’

¹¹“Truly 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.”

SERMON TEXT:

Earlier this year, I sat in an Emergency Room waiting area. A loved one was brought in by ambulance and I was waiting to hear how they were doing. Every time a nurse walked out, I wondered: *Is this the moment? Is this the news I've been waiting for?*

As the hours ticked on, the more restless and impatient I got. I flipped mindlessly through the outdated magazines. I took a trip to the vending machines and stared at the options, not picking any of them. I switched uncomfortable chairs. Multiple Times. I checked my phone probably a billion times. The sterile lights seemed to keep getting brighter and the clock ticked louder with every minute.

Waiting is hard. It can feel endless, especially when what we're waiting for could change everything.

I once heard a pastor describe Advent as "the season of holy impatience." That line has always stuck with me. Advent is a time of waiting, but it's not a passive, sit-around-and-do-nothing kind of waiting. It's a restless, hopeful, can't sit still, and sometimes anxious waiting.

John the Baptist knew that kind of waiting.

We join him in our Gospel today, sitting in prison, waiting and wondering.

John, who once stood waist-deep in the Jordan River, thundering about judgment and calling people to repentance, now sits in a damp, dark cell.

The silence is deafening. The only thing louder than his chains are his doubts.

He expected a Messiah with fire, decisiveness, and power – the one who would clear the threshing floor and burn away the chaff. But instead, he hears reports of Jesus healing the sick, touching lepers, eating with sinners. No fire, no fury. Just mercy.

And John can't help but wonder: *Was I wrong?*

So John sends his disciples to Jesus with a question: *"Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?"* (Matthew 11:3).

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

We feel this tension too.

We join John in our own "prisons."

- The *prison of disappointment* when life doesn't go the way we planned.
- The *prison of fear* when we cling to what is comfortable rather than risk God's newness.
- The *prison of doubt* when we wonder if Jesus really is the one.

- And maybe the biggest prison – the *prison of expectation*.
 - We expect God to fix things quickly, but the world still aches with violence, injustice, and despair.
 - We expect the church to be strong and full of life, but sometimes we see decline, uncertainty, and fear.
 - We expect our own lives to be easier if God is with us, but suffering still finds us.

And when expectations don't match reality, doubt creeps in. Like John, we find ourselves asking: *Is Jesus really who we hoped for? Or should we wait for another?*

This is one of the most human questions in all of Scripture.

Left to ourselves, we're tempted to put our trust elsewhere: in power, in wealth, in strong leaders... anyone who promises quicker or easier results than the quiet mercy of Jesus.

But *listen* to how Jesus answers John. He doesn't send back an argument. He doesn't shame John for doubting. Instead, Jesus answers with grace.

He points to signs of **God's Reign already breaking in**: "the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, those with a skin disease are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them." (Matthew 11:5).

Jesus is saying: *Yes, I am the one. And here's the proof – lives are being healed, restored, and lifted up.*

This echoes Isaiah's promises in our Old Testament reading for the day. In Isaiah 35 we hear:

⁵ Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
and the ears of the deaf shall be opened;
⁶ then the lame shall leap like a deer,
and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.

It's light and life. Signs that God's reign **IS** breaking in. One theologian¹ calls this a "three-layered connection": Isaiah's promises in the past, his ministry in the present, and God's reign in the future. All woven together.

In other words: Jesus is the center of salvation history, the One who was, who is, and who is to come.

That's the good news for John... and for us. We don't need to chase after different saviors. God's reign is already breaking in, even if it doesn't look like what we expected.

Then Jesus tells John's disciples: Go and tell *him what you see and hear*.

Jesus points John – and us – to signs of God's reign. Our call is to look for them, trust them, and join in them.

- To **see** where Christ is at work in our world – in acts of mercy, reconciliation, healing, and justice. In food pantries, in reconciled friendships, in small acts of care.

• ¹ O. Wesley Allen Jr., "Commentary on Matthew 11:2-11," *Working Preacher*, Christian Theological Seminary.

- To **hear** the good news – especially for the poor, the grieving, the marginalized. And then to embody that good news for others.
- To **tell** – to bear witness, in word and action, that Jesus is indeed the One. Like John, we point beyond ourselves to Christ. Even in doubt, we testify that Jesus is the one who brings life, mercy, justice, generosity, and love.

Advent faith isn't passive waiting. It's active participation in God's reign that is already breaking in.

So – are you the one? Or should we wait for another?

That's John's question. It's our question, too.

John asked it from a prison cell. We ask it when life unravels, when expectations go unmet, when waiting feels too long.

And Jesus answers: *Look around. Listen closely. See the signs of life. Hear the good news. God's reign is breaking in. I am the One.* We don't need to wait for another. Christ is the One. And he is here.

Amen.

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