

Are You the One?
Matthew 11:2-11
December 12, 2010
3rd Sunday of Advent

John wanted to know: “Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?” It was an urgent question. John the Baptist had spent his ministry calling people to repent as a way of preparing the way for the coming of the Messiah. Now he was sitting in a prison cell and time was running out for him. He needed to know if the Messiah was definitely Jesus, because he didn’t have time to wait for another. He had to know right now: “Are you the one?”

In Matthew 11:4-5 we have Jesus’ answer to John’s disciples who had come asking on John’s behalf.

Jesus told them, "Go back to John and tell him what you have heard and seen—the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life, and the Good News is being preached to the poor.

The messianic age which John had heralded was unfolding. Yes, Jesus was saying, I am the One for whom you have been waiting. The fact that Jesus was the One had been proclaimed even at his birth by the man, Simeon, who encountered the infant Jesus at the Temple in Jerusalem.

Hear the story again in the words of Luke:

At that time there was a man in Jerusalem named Simeon. He was righteous and devout and was eagerly waiting for the Messiah to come and rescue Israel. The Holy Spirit was upon him and had revealed to him that he would not die until he had seen the Lord's Messiah. That day the Spirit led him to the Temple. So when Mary and Joseph came to present the baby Jesus to the Lord as the law required, Simeon was there. He took the child in his arms and praised God, saying,

*"Sovereign Lord, now let your servant die in peace,
as you have promised.*

I have seen your salvation,

which you have prepared for all people.

He is a light to reveal God to the nations,

and he is the glory of your people Israel!" (Luke 2:25-32)

John could also die in peace because his eyes had beheld God’s salvation for mankind. Jesus is the one who communicates God’s grace to us in a concrete way.

You see, while Jesus and John are linked together throughout the various gospels, they did not necessarily see the Messianic Age through the same lens. John the Baptist was a strict moralist who preached the judgment of God as penalty for human sin. John had a hard time overlooking

sin. That's why he was sitting in prison. He had outspokenly condemned Herod Antipas for divorcing his own wife after seducing and marrying the wife of his brother while his brother was still alive. Not only was this something right out of the Jerry Springer Show, it violated the Mosaic Law. For John, the Messianic Age would be marked by God's awful judgment on the Day of the Lord.

But of course, Jesus always turned things on their heads. For Jesus, the Messianic Age that he ushered in was to be marked more by God's offer of mercy and grace. You can almost see these two men's views juxtaposed in Paul's words in Romans 6:23:

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.

Sin was taken no less seriously by Jesus, it's just that his focus was not on the penalty for sin; it was primarily on the possibility of forgiveness and reconciliation of the sinner to God the Father.

As you and I find ourselves in the midst of Advent, we know that Jesus was the one – we are not still looking for another. And as we look ahead toward his coming again, may we find inspiration and beauty in the words of the prophet Isaiah:

Seek the Lord while you can find him.

Call on him now while he is near.

*Let the wicked change their ways
and banish the very thought of doing wrong.*

Let them turn to the Lord that he may have mercy on them.

Yes, turn to our God, for he will forgive generously. (Isaiah 55:6-7)

We need not harbor any doubts or uncertainties. Jesus has already answered our question.

...tell [them] what you have heard and seen—the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life, and the Good News is being preached to the poor.

Let us go and tell the world the Good News that:

...unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. (Isaiah 9:2)

In Jesus the prophets words in Isaiah are fulfilled:

I, yes I, am the Lord,

and there is no other Savior. (Isaiah 43:11)