

Homily 12/11

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing to you, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

Did you hear the good news in the readings this morning? The good news in the readings from Isaiah and in the psalm? The good news in the Gospel reading?

Not the good news that the Messiah is coming, although that is good news indeed and the news we usually hear during this season, but rather the good news of God's love for the poorest and least powerful.

Hear again the good news from Isaiah (35: 1-10): "the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped...the lame shall leap like a deer and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy"

And Psalm 146 says of the Lord that "he executes justice for the oppressed ...gives food to the hungry ...sets the prisoners free...lifts up those who are bowed down ... and ... upholds the orphan and the widow".

And James (5:7-10), writing to his fellow Christians some 20 years after the death of Jesus also proclaims good news. His good news is that Christ will come again.

Now how does this Gospel of good news fit into the story of John the Baptist and Jesus? You'll remember that at the beginning of Jesus' ministry he was baptized by John the Baptist and at that time John gave this testimony: "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him" (John 1:32) and "I have seen and I testify that this is God's Chosen One." (John 1:34) John the Baptist appeared to believe that he was indeed baptizing the Messiah and one who was far greater than himself.

Today's reading (Matthew 11:2-11) takes place several years later. Herod has imprisoned John for openly criticizing his adulterous behavior with his brother's wife - never a good thing to do with a powerful despot. It seems that John has been in jail for some time, enough time perhaps to begin to rethink his expectations of Jesus. Could it be that John was expecting a Messiah on a war horse leading legions of soldiers to overturn the existing political order and redress the wrongs of those who had been out of power? Instead, he seems to have gotten a Messiah who would soon be riding a donkey into Jerusalem. Riding a donkey surrounded by cheering crowds of the poor and powerless. Riding a donkey to his death.

Perhaps John's expectations of Jesus - of the Messiah - did not match the reality of Jesus's ministry. And so, John sent his disciples to ask Jesus "Are you the one?" And as he so often did, Jesus did not reply with a yes or a no. Instead, he said to John's disciples "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the 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."

Good news! The Kingdom of God is not the kingdom of the rich and powerful and it is not a kingdom to be run with legions of soldiers. The Kingdom of God is the kingdom of the poorest and most needy.

This Messiah whom John had baptized would ride into Jerusalem on a donkey - but today as we move through Advent, toward Christmas, we might remember that a baby not yet born is making his way to Bethlehem on a donkey. His birth won't be in a palace but in a rude stable; angels will visit not the rich and mighty, but the lowest of shepherds; and the Wise Men who come to bring him homage will find themselves kneeling on a dirt floor. It was as one of the lowly that he was born and in life, as in his birth, it was the lowly he embraced.

Earlier I said that possibly John the Baptist's expectations of the Messiah were not those that Jesus embodied. What are our expectations?

Trinity Parish has made outreach a priority of our worship. As Bishop Scruton has commented, we have become known "as a parish that cares for and seeks to bring good news to the poor through our mission outreach of giving and action." Through the generosity and work of many parish members we have truly been able to impact the lives of individuals both locally and around the world.

During this season we may ask ourselves what can we do next year? How can we through our outreach as a parish and through our own individual actions reply to Jesus' invitation to love and care for those who are most needy? Throughout the upcoming year how can we match our expectations to those of the Jesus who walked with and embraced the most lowly?

Let us now take a moment to pray together the prayer *For the Poor and Neglected* (number 35 on page 826 of the Book of Common Prayer.)

Almighty and most merciful God, we remember before you all poor and neglected persons whom it would be easy for us to forget: the homeless and the destitute, the old and the sick, and all who have none to care for them. Help us to heal those who are broken in body or spirit, and to turn their sorrow into joy. Grant this, Father, for the love of your Son, who for our sake became poor, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

May you have a blessed Advent season and a blessed Christmas.

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