

Sermon Advent 3 Year A

[RCL] Isaiah 35:1-10; James 5:7-10; Matthew 11:2-11; Psalm 146:4-9 or Canticle 15

Can You See and Hear God's Presence in Your Life?

We are well into the third week of Advent season. Advent is a season of waiting, expectation, and preparation for the coming of the Messiah.

But who is this Messiah? Do we have any preconceived idea how we like this Messiah to be? John the Baptist seems to have certain ideas.

In today's Gospel, after hearing what Jesus did, John sends his question to Jesus, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?"

It seems John may have doubts about the identity of Jesus.

But in the Gospel of Luke, we know that John the Baptist jumped for joy in Elizabeth's womb before both he and Jesus were born when the two mothers met. (Luke 1:41) In last week's Gospel, John introduces Jesus as, "I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." (Matt 3:11)

John the Baptist knows perfectly well who Jesus is. So, why is he questioning? Well, remember, John is in prison! Has his imprisonment has caused him to doubt Jesus?

The Messiah is not saving John from prison, and the one who is supposed to take away the sin from the world is not taking away the sin away from Herod. Would you blame John the Baptist or anybody to doubt in such situation?

After hearing the question, as usual, Jesus does not answer directly but tells 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." (Matthew 11:4-6)

We see that the doubt of John the Baptist gets his disciples to be mindful of what Jesus does. The doubt of John the Baptist is pointing people to pay attention to see and hear Jesus.

Uncertain, scary, and helpless times can shake one up and cause doubts in one's faith. Today's Gospel is a good reflection of our spiritual journey. We can be like John the Baptist. When we are moved by the Holy Spirit, we vow to follow God. It is very clear and true. Or when we receive blessings, we are sure Jesus is our Savior.

When we face adversity and disasters, we question if Jesus really is the Savior. We question why bad things happen, why God is not there for us, and doubt even if God really exists. We tend to think God only exists when we are in good times. That is our preconceived idea of our Savior and why we are in doubt when things do not go our way. We are wrapped up in our own world and cannot hear or see God's presence.

Nevertheless, being in doubt may get us closer to God. John the Baptist may be in doubt but his questioning points people to question God also. Then people pay attention to hear and see, find God's grace and bring back the good news of Jesus to the doubter.

Doubting is part of our spiritual journey. However, the process may seem unbearable. We need to point each other to hear and see God's grace to keep our faith. Sometimes we do have to wait in uncertain, and anxious moments before the truth comes out.

Advent is a season of waiting, expectation, and preparation for the coming of the Messiah. We are blessed that we know the certainty of the birth of Jesus. Yet, we are still waiting for the second coming of the Messiah. This time of waiting can be anxious and fearful time.

There is chaos in different parts of the world. We have our fair share of chaos causing disappointment, anxiety, fear, and anger in our own country right now. Enough people question the presence of God.

Will we be able to not be distracted by our own self-centeredness, and anxiety or our own pre-conception about God but look for God, and go and tell people what we see and hear about the presence of God?

As Christians, during Advent we are to slow down, reflect, and pray while waiting for the coming of our Lord. We need to reflect on what it means to be followers of Jesus our Lord, and our seeing and hearing of our Lord.

In a sense, we all have experienced what Jesus said: The blind receive their sight.

The lame walk.

The lepers are cleansed.

The deaf hear.

The dead are raised.

The poor have good news brought to them.

If we are baptized, aren't haven't we experienced these things?

Through baptism, weren't we once blind and deaf, but now can see and hear God's good news?

Weren't we once crooked but now could stand straight?

Weren't we once uncleaned, but now cleansed by God's Holy Spirit?

Didn't we die to our previous life and now live a new life?

Didn't we, the once poor in spirit, receive good news?

Truly, if we keep our eyes and ears open, we will hear and see plenty of God's mighty work literally and metaphorically even in bad times. We will be able to go and tell.

It is time for us to share the good news and hope with others especially with those who are in doubt.

Br. Curtis Almquist of Society of Saint John the Evangelist writes in one of his daily meditations that:

"All of that stuff that isn't right yet in us and in those whom we love will be satisfied and healed, but most likely it won't all happen in this life. And in the meantime, sometimes a very mean time, we continue to come back to Jesus to be reminded of his real presence with us, and his provision to meet our immediate and ongoing needs."

We are waiting in uncertainty but we are waiting in hope because of Emmanuel – God's presence with us.

In the last few weeks, we have been reading from the Prophet Isaiah. He has been bringing the good news of Emmanuel to us. Today Isaiah says:

"They shall see the glory of the Lord, the majesty of our God. Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who are of a fearful heart, 'Be strong, do not fear!' ... And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."

Yes, the Lord shall return.

Traditionally the third week of Advent is joy. When we can see and hear God's presence – Emmanuel, in good times and bad times, and know God is coming again, isn't that joyful? Amen.