

Advent 3
Matthew 11:2-11
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John is in prison, soon to lose his head, and he sends some friends to question Jesus. "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" Jesus says, "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. And blessed is anyone who does not take offense at me."

Dan meets 3 friends for tennis after work: a way to work out and to have good conversation. Today they talk about the recent disclosure of the study done on the use of steroids and performance enhancing drugs in baseball. They also discuss a variety of other topics as they work on their ground strokes and serves. One man said, "You know that you hear a lot about how good and kind people are at Christmas, but I think we're all basically selfish, out to take care of ourselves. I don't think that the birth of Christ has changed anyone's basic nature. Christians are just as selfish as anyone else."

John the Baptist is in prison because of the selfishness of Herod, and he wonders why Jesus isn't meeting his expectations of what the Messiah should be. Why is there still such selfishness, lying and deception among people in positions of power.

We may share John's concern because, like John the Baptist, we may have a different idea of what the Messiah is to be like. Are we expecting Jesus Christ to lay down the law, tell people off, put them in their place? Are we expecting that if we are faithful to Jesus, we will be spared from all the problems and suffering that we see going on in the world? Are we expecting Jesus to take care of our enemies in the world so that everything can go smoothly for us and for our families? If that is true, then we, like John, may be taking offense at Jesus, and be disappointed at what Jesus turned out to be.

Jesus says, "Tell John what you hear and see." Words and actions are important in the Kingdom of heaven. Back at the tennis court, it was Dan's turn to serve. This time he held the tennis ball in his hand and called his 3 friends over so that he could tell them a story, especially the friend who talked about selfishness. Dan said, "I heard something recently I haven't been able to get out of my mind. As you know I walk every morning over to the convenient store to get a paper and a cup of coffee. Then I turn around and walk the 2 miles back home."

One day last week I went into the store, and the manager behind the counter who saves me a paper, and whom I have known for years, was standing at the window with tears in his eyes. He asked me to look at the bench across the street at the bus stop. He said, "Dan, there is a woman who comes there every day around this time. She sits there for about an hour, knitting and waiting. Buses come and go, but she never boards one and she never meets anyone who is getting off. She just does this knitting work and waits. One day I took a cup of coffee over to her and I just sat with her for a while. She told me that she and her son were not getting along very well, and last year he went to live with his aunt in another state. He then joined the Marines and went to Iraq. Before he left he got married, and after he had to leave for Iraq his wife had their first child. She wrote to her son every day and she has never seen his wife or her grandchild. He has now returned to the States and they live in California. They have reconciled with one another, but she doesn't have enough money to go to see them, and they can't come to see her. The lady said that it helps to come to the bus stop and wait. She said, "I pray for them, and I knit little things for the baby, and I imagine them in their apartment on the base. They are saving money to come home on the bus next Christmas. I can't

wait to see them.”

Dan said, “The manager, my friend, behind the counter took a deep breath and said, ‘I looked out there just now, and they were getting off the bus. You should have seen the look on her face when they fell into her arms, and when she laid her eyes on her little granddaughter for the first time. It was the nearest thing to pure joy that I have ever seen. I’ll never forget that look of joy for as long as I live.’”

The next morning when Dan walked to the store, he said, “I looked my friend in the eye and I said to him, ‘You sent her son the money for the bus tickets, didn’t you?’ With that look of joy still in his eye, he said ‘Yes, I sent him the money.” Jesus has come, is coming and to be selflessly giving His life for us, and to send us into the lives of those who are blind, lame, dying, and poor so that we can share with all people the joy of Christ as an experience we will never forget.

There are people in our own lives who wonder, and we also may be wondering, “Are you the one who is to come, or should we wait for another?” When cancer strikes a loved one in the prime of life, or when our life stories are changing in scary ways and we don’t know the outcome, we may be asking that question.

Jesus says, “Repent for the Kingdom of heaven has come near to you. What do 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.” Not everyone is healed in the way we might like. Our stories don’t always have happy endings, but the promise we have is that Jesus Christ comes to walk with us through the storms and problems that we face in life. Jesus Christ is our source of lasting joy who opens our eyes and ears so that we don’t focus only on ourselves, but on the needs of people around us. Jesus Christ has the love for us to share for the healing and joy of the whole world. In Christ we don’t escape the problems of life, but we are sent even more deeply into them.

In faith we go to be with those in prison and those who are waiting and hoping for good news in their lives. We wait and we pray and we look for the coming of Christ to bring hope and joy to all people. Where we see glimpses of selfless love, and when we have the opportunity of bringing good news to the poor, like we heard in the story of the family getting off the bus, then that joy is the gift of Advent and Christmas, the gift of Jesus Christ, the one who has come, is coming and will come again. We don’t need to wait for anyone else. Amen.