

What Did John Know?

Third Week of Advent- December 11, 2016 – Matthew 11: 2-11

On this third week of Advent, the gospel seems to raise the question of what John knew about Jesus. It seems obvious that John would know that Jesus is the Messiah but it appears that the evangelist, Matthew, is saying something different. **“When John the Baptist heard in prison of the works of the Christ, he sent his disciples to Jesus with this question, ‘Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another.’”** Why would John pose this question if he did know? Or is this Matthew’s attempt to challenge his specific community as well as us today? In terms of our own lives and our Advental waiting...Who is this Jesus who is coming to us?

Scripture scholars suggest that Jesus’ message of love and mercy is a stark contrast to John’s message of a vengeful God. In some ways it appears that John may be a bit thrown off by this rather unusual approach to the Kingdom of God.

Jesus reminds John that the coming Messiah has been announced and referred to by the prophets for centuries. Not all of them have proclaimed a vengeful God. Jesus’ response includes a reference to the prophet Isaiah (our first reading this week) which proclaims that a new day will dawn when flowers abundantly bloom in the desert, the feeble will be strengthened, the blind will regain sight and the deaf will hear. This is a message of hope, of love and of mercy.

If you look in your Bible, you will see that this particular gospel story comes after the many miracles of Jesus in Matthew’s gospel. Jesus has performed a number of healings. He had calmed the storm at sea. He has also cured the blind and the deaf. Jesus’ response to John’s disciples is very simple. **“Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the good news proclaimed to them. And blessed is the one who takes no offense at me.”**

Scripture scholars will say that it appears that this last statement is a bit of a chastisement to John but in fact, they believe it is a prelude to the coming rejection and mistrust of Jesus that builds in the coming chapters of Matthew’s gospel.

Ultimately, Jesus ends this particular gospel story with an affirmation of John’s important role in salvation history. John’s work, to prepare the way for the coming Messiah, is part of God’s overall plan. Jesus warns that even John is not as great as the coming Kingdom of God. What is to come is beyond the scope of human understanding or imagination. The reign of God will bring forth the healing, mercy and love that is only possible through the Divine presence of Jesus, Savior of the world.

Happy Advent!


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