

Year A, Advent III
December 11, 2016
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“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 11:14).

Jesus’ work caught people’s attention. The blind could suddenly see; the lame could were walking; lepers were restored to health (and the community), the deaf could hear, and Jesus was even known to raise the dead to life again. On top of it all, he had a message of hope for the poor that was best described as Godspell- good news! With these dramatic and miraculous signs John sent his disciples to ask plainly, “Are you the one- the Messiah of God?”

Today people still ask that question of Jesus, “Are you the one?” We want a plain and simple answer. We want a “Yes” from Jesus. Jesus has been saying, “Yes” without saying “Yes” for a long time and still does so today. For those of us willing to put in the time, there can be great reward in discerning God’s presence in the world and in our lives.

In fact this question forms the basis of spiritual direction. “Where is God in this event? Where is God in your life?” Once a month I go to a spiritual director and we have just such a conversation. Even clergy benefit from having someone else assist us in connecting the dots in our stories.

Stories are the means by which we discover or rediscover God in our midst, seemingly hidden and present all at the same time. Now would be the opportune time to roll out a new miracle story, but instead I want to place focus on God’s activity in our day-to-day lives. Why is this important to highlight God in the incidentals of life? First I think it shows that God is God of all of our lives, even those parts we think he might not care about, and second- changed lives are always a sign of God’s presence.

If you are a regular reader of our monthly newsletter you’ve noticed the new column called “Blessings”. Through this means we highlight activities through which the church has received or given true blessings. It might be a baptism, the collection and distribution of food and clothing to the poor, a gift of a parishioner for a new handrail in the church, a fundraiser for students in our S.T.A.I.R. Program. (Please note the shameless plug for the Yeti cooler raffle.) Or we might simply be giving thanks for healing. God is at work in our church and in our lives in miraculous and less dramatic ways, but if we rely only on the big stage miracles, we will be sadly disappointed and may even lose our faith.

John the Baptist had prepared the way for Jesus and by all accounts was not fully aware of his own role in the Jesus movement. Hadn’t he baptized Jesus and seen the dove and heard the thundering voice of God instructing all people to “Listen to my beloved son”? But then his faith seemed to run cold- not surprising given his time in prison. This is not how it was supposed to

be- God's messiah would come with winnowing fork in his hand the chaff he would burn with unquenchable fire". In other words the good would triumph and be rewarded; the sinful would be swept away.

As much as we might long for God's justice to sweep in like a tidal wave it more often moves as subtly as a gentle tide. God is still just, but perhaps in ways that don't necessarily meet our expectations. God still performs miracles, but most often the work of God can be seen over the long view- something of a challenge in our world of immediate technology.

Today at our Annual Meeting, in addition to the elections, you will receive a series of statistical reports, most of which I believe show us trending positively, but what statistics don't show the narrative life of our church reflects that the work we do here is indeed life changing. In the end, that's really the test and far more important than a balanced budget, which we have, and decent attendance numbers. Behind these numbers are people who have felt the hand of God directly.

From a prayer for someone undergoing a medical test to pastoral care of a community in a time of crisis, God is at work in our church. So when we ask the hard question of Jesus, "Are you the one?" Expect the same answer he gave the Baptist- Go and tell what you hear and see, starting first in your own life and that which you observe in your very midst. *Amen.*