

3rd Sunday Advent A 16

December 11, 2016

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer.
Amen.

Like many of you, Debbie and I have been out doing some Christmas shopping.

While we do not do as much as we used to, we still do some and the question is always; 'is this the present we want to give?' We want to be sure that what we choose is the right, maybe even perfect gift. We want them to be joyful and light up saying, 'this is the very thing I had hoped for.'

While we do not always get that reaction, we do get it right more than not. But that does not keep us from wondering as we are pushing our way through the stores, fighting our way to the cash register, 'is this the right gift?' Even when we settle on a particular gift, then there are so many choices. Want a green sweater. Then you have to decide if it is a crew neck or a v-neck. It is a cashmere or wool or cotton sweater? Is it bulky cable knit pull over or a cardigan button up. I know it might seem strange that I know all of these terms, but that is what you do when you are shopping for that perfect gift. That is without considering the real color, because there is no such thing as a green sweater. It is forest green or sea green or grass green or even that green with a big yellow G on it.

All of this to say, we spend a lot of time seeking out and considering choices and we want to make the right choice and not be lead astray to some trendy or un-wise choice when it comes to getting that right thing for the person we love. Choices are a part of our daily life in ways that go way beyond picking the right sweater. Because even when we think we have it right, doubt and uncertainty creeps in and we say to ourselves, 'is this the right one?'

Our doubts and questions come whenever we make decisions in life, in the major areas of our life as well as the minor ones. Questions about choosing the profession you want to pursue in life, where you want to live, the person you

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want to spend the rest of your life with, what you believe as core principals to live by, that you hold on to and believe to be true.

In our reading from James we are reminded of our need to remain patient. Just as the farmer waits for the ground to be ready, then waits again for the rains and the sun to allow the harvest to mature. We must be patient, strengthening our hearts for the coming of the Lord is near. That is what this season of Advent is all about, remaining patient as we await the coming of the Lord. But even as we are certain about that which we are waiting for, doubts arise; questions start to nag at us. Are you sure? Are you positive this is the thing, this is the one we are to wait for?

For all of us at one moment in time we remain steadfast and certain, then in the next due to a change in circumstances or our place in life causes uncertainties to arise which push us to ask, 'is that what we are waiting for?' Our Gospel lesson responds to this very situation for us this day.

Last week John the Baptist was certain and confident of who he was and his position in life. John was on the banks of the river Jordan baptizing all who came to him. He was pointing to the one who was to come after him, that one who would set the world free from their sins and usher in the kingdom of God on earth. There was little doubt in his words or actions. John was so confident that he was able to speak truth to power, to push back against the religious and civil authorities.

Yet as we know, speaking truth to the powerful, often times can get the person in hot water, just as it did for John who now finds himself in prison at the hands of King Herod. From prison John hears of all the things which the Messiah that is what Jesus was doing. John too was waiting for the arrival of the Messiah, the one who was to come and to bring about the new Kingdom of

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God on earth. Believing that Jesus is the one, but with his imprisonment, began to question if Jesus was the one after all the Messiah was to bring about peace and over-throw the oppressive Roman occupation. That was going to be one way for the people to know that the Kingdom of God had arrived. So what was Jesus waiting on, what was he doing, why was he not acting like the Messiah the people expected?

So the disciples of John arrive to where Jesus was preaching and healing asking and hoping Jesus would put their doubts to rest. 'Are you the one or are we to wait for another?' they ask. In Jesus' response he seeks to reassure and to ask people to make up their own minds and believe. *"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 takes no offense at me."*

Jesus is reminding John, his disciples and all who are around him as to what the prophets said about the coming of the Messiah and how you will know the true coming. Words similar to that which the prophet Isaiah wrote about in our first reading today; *"Here is your God. He will come with vengeance, with terrible recompense. He will come and save you." Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.*" These are the signs of the coming of the Kingdom of God.

Jesus is telling them to remember what the great prophets of old tell us about the one who is to come, to listen and look around and decide if you believe. Then Jesus turns to those who remain to remind and reassure them of who John is by asking them; *'What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written, "See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.'*

Matthew 11:2-11

When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" Jesus answered them, "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 takes no offense at me." As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? What then did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces. What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written, "See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.' Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

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Jesus is telling the people and reassuring John that he was the one sent to prepare the way, encouraging John to stay confident and true to who he is and who God called him to be. John was the prophet sent to point the way to the arrival of the Messiah. So do not have doubts or question what you believe but remain faithful to your calling in life.

This message hold true for us as well. For some of us, we are brimming with confidence holding fast to the truth that Jesus is the Messiah, the light which has come into the world. Others because of circumstances beyond our control, the uncertainty of our jobs or of the economy, our mourning the death of loved ones, when we feel the pushback from speaking truth to power or just questioning that which we believe, we start to wonder; 'is this the one I can put my faith in?'

So in these days of Advent as we wait and watch, as we hear the good news proclaimed, as we see God at work in the world around us, we can remain confident and hold fast to the truth and we do so with patience strengthened in our hearts for the coming of the Lord is near.

AMEN

T.G.B.T.G.

Pastor Michael