

My Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Our Gospel lesson this morning revolves around two questions – the question of John to Jesus – Are you the Coming One, or shall we look for someone else?, and the question of Jesus about John, What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? What did you go out to see? Both of them are questions that we could consider – one of them we must consider. The question about John, though, is not so significant to us unless we translate it into our modern age, and place our congregation and its mission here in the place of the prophet John. When we do that, we change the question of Jesus into the theme of our sermon this morning, Why are you here?

First, however, is the question John asked of Jesus. Are you the Coming One or shall we look for someone else? That is the question that rings through the ages in one form or another – What do you think of Jesus Christ? Is He God, or simply a good man? Is He really and fully human, or does it just seem that way? Is Jesus Savior, or is He Judge? Is He the Center of your existence, or simply an embellishment to it? Do you believe in the Jesus of the Bible or the modern, politically correct, socially sensitive, humanistic Jesus? Was Jesus the One, or are you still looking for someone else?

In the days of Jesus, the people who were waiting for the Messiah were often waiting for someone else. When they met the Messiah, they didn't want to believe that this humble man was the One. They wanted someone else. Today, many people want another Jesus. They want the “heck of a nice guy” Jesus who takes everyone just the way they are, and asks for nothing, expects no changes, overlooks anything and everything. Or, perhaps, they want the Ecumenical Jesus, the one who doesn't care if we know Him, who measures us by our public niceness to others, and who is pleased if people simply learn to pay lip

service to the existence of a deity of one sort or another.

Jesus gave John the answer: look at the Jesus who IS, and know Him. Jesus told John's disciples to look at what they saw and hear in Him. Jesus mentioned in specific the things which He had done, that the Messiah was going to do, according to the prophets. Then Jesus said, And blessed is he who keeps from stumbling over Me. In other words, blessed is the one who believes in the Messiah who has actually come – who does not stumble over the real Jesus or who does not have another Jesus, a preferable Jesus, in mind. Jesus told John to face the reality that was reported – for us, that is the Jesus of the Bible, with the values and morality and doctrines of the Bible. We cannot have Jesus if we reject Him and what He taught just because it feels good, or because someone we love has already rejected Him, and we don't want to face an uncomfortable truth about their spiritual life.

Which leads quite naturally to the questions of Jesus for the crowd. He asked them why they had come – pointing to John rather than Himself, but asking them if they were about reality – the man that was out in the wilderness or about some fantasy – something not real. But when Jesus pointed to John, He was actually pointing to Himself. John was His messenger. The conclusions they drew about John would also shape the conclusions they drew about Jesus.

So, why are you here? Did you come here to confront holy mysteries and deal with Jesus as He is, or did you come here for some other purpose, with another agenda in mind? Did you come for heavenly food, or a symbolic meal? Did you come to be shaped and instructed, or just to feel good? Why are you here?

If you see this congregation as here for you, rather than you here for everyone else, you are not here for Jesus. If you see a worship service as simply a place one can go to in order to feel good, you are

“Why are You Here” Matthew 11:2-10 Advent 3 2021

not seeing reality. If you see the messenger of Christ as simply opinionated and peculiar, or even as a nice guy and easy to listen to, and do not listen, and inwardly digest the Word preached and if you accept or reject the message you hear proclaimed out of hand, without examining what is taught and preached in the Word, you have not come to see Jesus. If you have come expecting something like a fast-food place where you can get your religion served up hot and fresh and just the way you like it, you have not come to see Jesus.

This is an assembly of Christ’s holy people. He has gathered His holy priesthood together here. We are to expect to be refreshed and strengthened. He has promised it to us, and we believe His promises. He has promised that our sins are forgiven and we have eternal life on account of what He has accomplished on the cross. He has promised that those who remain faithful will rise from their graves in glory unto everlasting life and joy.

He has not promised, however, that being here or living this life as His servant will feel good, or please our intellect, or appeal to any part of us that may be included in the description “our sinful flesh.” His doctrines may not appeal to you – but if they are His, drawn clearly from His holy Word, they are also ours to keep and to believe and to confess. He has also called us to serve Him in good times and in difficult times.

Jesus asked them what they went out to see when they went out after John. Of course, the only thing they really could see was that which was there – the prophet of God. Even if they denied that he was the prophet, that is still all that there was out there for them to see. Even when people deny the truth, or want God and their religion on their own terms, there is still only one God, and one true faith – and only one salvation. If they come with any other agenda than God’s agenda, they come in vain, without purpose and without success.

Why are you here? All there is here is the mystery of God's love in Jesus Christ, the purity of the Word, the refreshment of the Sacraments, and the fellowship of the saints. In it and through it all God gives us forgiveness and resurrection and eternal life for the sake of Jesus Christ. You will be glad because that is what you need, and we will be all be here for the right reason - to be strengthened in faith in the Jesus who gives us everlasting life.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.