

“What Will We See?”  
Isaiah 35:1-10; James 5:7-10;  
Matthew 11:2-11

December 11, 2016  
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What does the future hold? What is next? What’s coming?

Last week we talked to a peasant from Palestine and heard his hope based on the Old Testament readings; hope of the Messiah coming. This week we hear John wondering a bit. What is that hope? Has it really happened? Is it happening? There’s probably a little confusion because with the fellow coming in the line of David, they might have expected a more militaristic, a more kingly approach. So I think that might be what John is asking about. “Jesus, are you really the one, or shall we ask for someone else?” What does the future bring? What is the hope we hold?

And so, Jesus has a reply. He tells them to go tell John what they see: the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are healed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor receive good news.

What are we to see when the Messiah comes? I think about what Jesus tells those followers of John. The blind see. I think as we read this we have to recognize that while there are a few people who are seeing anew in actual physical ways, Jesus is also, I think, talking beyond that. Later he will say things like, “The Pharisees are the blind leading the blind.” It’s the inability to see reality fully. There’s a seeing that is new. The blind see.

The lame walk. Is it just healing a few folks from their lameness? Or is there something about those lame walking, enabled to participate in the journey, that is really about enabling us all to go on the journey?

The leper cleansed. Cleansing enabled somebody to be part of the community.

The deaf hear. They are able to hear what’s going on. There are a number of times where Jesus says, “Let those who have ears hear.” One time he says to his disciples, “Don’t you have ears to hear?” There’s a sense of inviting us to hear in a new way, to hear what he is really saying, to hear what God is really doing in their midst.

The dead raised. Now, he didn’t go around raising somebody every day. There are a few stories of him raising Lazarus and maybe a child or two. But we also know that the wages of sin are death. He is in a way raising all those who have received that wage and already know the death that inhabits life.

If we think about it in this way—both the physical and real experience of a few, but also the metaphorical experience of many—as we begin to think about what it looks like to say the blind see, we get a new perspective on what is real. We are invited to participate in the journey. We get the ability to do that. We get to be part of a

community; we are cleansed. We get to enter in with Christ, and then can really hear what he has to say. We find that we are forgiven and the wages of sin no longer hold us down. He gives us life, and that really is good news for the poor.

It's very similar, I think, to what Mary says when she greets Elizabeth. It's the same kind of vision. She knows that she is pregnant and is going to bear the Son of God. She says:

*"My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord. My spirit rejoices in God, my Savior, for he has looked with favor upon his lowly servant. From this day all generations shall call me blessed. The mighty one has done good things for me and holy is his name. He has mercy on those who fear him in every generation. He has shown the strength of his arm. He has scattered the proud in their conceit. He cast down the mighty from their thrones and lifts up the lowly. He fills the hungry with good things and the rich he has sent away empty. He has come to the help of his servant Israel, for he has remembered his promise of mercy."*

Jesus is responding to John around that promise of mercy that God enters in and brings to us all. The struggle is that it sounds wonderful to me, yet in the midst some of the moments in my life, I'm not always clear that it is all happening. So in part, I think it's an invitation to look and to see where it might be happening, how it might be happening, and that I'm just not seeing it.

Perhaps it also leads me back to that passage from James that invites me to have patience that it will happen, a patience that God is at work. That passage starts out with "a farmer has to wait," suggesting we are like farmers. The active part of that is something farmers do. They plant seeds. It feels to me like what we do, the preparation we do, is planting the seeds. The repentance we do is a way of looking to what Jesus is bringing. How do we make it possible for the blind to see, the deaf to hear, the lame to walk, the leper to be cleansed, the dead to be raised? We can't necessarily do all those things all at once, but perhaps there are seeds we can plant, the seeds of God's love that we give to one another—the ways we can help each other see; the ways we can hold each other up to walk; the ways we can say you are cleansed, you are a child of God; the ways we can say, "I think you can hear;" the ways we can get people to turn around from their sin and know the life that God gives us; the seeds of the good news for all people.

There's a story of a child whose teacher was doing a segment on how things grow. He gave each of the children in the class a sunflower seed. The child planted the seed, and was excited about it because the child loved sunflowers. The child saw that first little bit coming up and he goes to the teacher and says, "Can I pull it up now?" The teacher said, "No, there are no seeds yet." It got bigger, and the child came again. "Can I pull it up now?" "No, you have to wait for it to flower. That's where the seeds are." So the sunflower bloomed and immediately the child took it and found it hadn't developed yet so the seeds were no good. He watched as the others let their flowers

grow, and then the flowers faded and the seeds were good. Sometimes it takes patience to let the seed grow, to let the fruit happen.

Perhaps sometimes we are in those phases of life where we are planting the seeds. Perhaps we are in those phases where we see the stalk and see it growing, wondering if it will ever bear fruit. In a lot of ways, Advent is that time of trusting that God will bring the fruit. It is as we do the things of growth that we trust in the promises, even live into those promises. It's also a moment of patience and trust that God will bring it to fruition. God brings it all to flower, and God sees our wonder. We just have to wait sometimes. And waiting can be hard. And waiting in the moment is the time to practice the gift of helping people see, of lifting people up, of holding people in community, and finding that God raises us up to life and good news breaks forth.

It's a vision and a promise that starts with the seeds we plant each day, the lives we lead each day, trusting in the grace and promise of God. Amen.