

“Go and Tell What You Hear and See”

Matthew 11:2-15

During this Advent Season, the Gospel lessons have been ones that remind us to “keep watch” and “be prepared” for Christ’s return. In our Gospel today, we see who this Christ is for whom we are watching and preparing. He is the One promised throughout the Old Testament. He is the One of whom the prophet Isaiah foretold. He is the Son of God.

Matthew presents to us what appears to be a puzzling account of John the Baptist’s and Jesus’ relationship. John has been preaching and preparing the people for the coming of Christ. And now, when John the Baptist is in prison and his public ministry is over, it is puzzling that he then sends his disciples to ask Jesus, “Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?”

Was John having doubts about who Jesus was? Many scholars suggest that was the case. Personally, I find that hard to believe. Before John or Jesus were born, John leaped for joy in the womb of his mother Elizabeth when the sound of Mary’s voice was heard [Lk. 1:41]. John is the man who baptized Jesus in the Jordan River and heard the voice of our Father in heaven say, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased” [Mt. 3:17]. John declared Him to be “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” I just personally find it hard to believe that John was the person who was doubting that Jesus was the Messiah.

John was a prophet. Jesus said that he was “more than a prophet”...“He is the Elijah who was to come” [Mt. 11:14]. Elijah never

doubted who God was. But like Elijah, John was having a difficult time convincing other people about God's plan of salvation. Elijah, at one point in his ministry, despaired to the point of death that he was the only one in all of Israel who still believed in the One, True God.

Elijah was wrong. The Lord tells him there were 7000 children of Israel who had not bowed down to Baal or other gods [1 Ki. 19:18]. It seems, for all of preaching and baptizing, for all of his teaching, even John's disciples remained unconvinced. He had to send his disciples to hear the words from the Son of God's own mouth.

John the Baptist is the man of whom Jesus says, "Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater" [Mt. 11:11], and still John has difficulty convincing even those who are closest to him that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

This is a good lesson for us. Don't be too hard on yourself when it seems that all of your efforts fail to convince those who are close to you about the truth of who Jesus Christ is.

We would be gravely mistaken if we thought that it was solely through our effort that people come to faith. However, that does not give us an excuse to give up on someone or to neglect our responsibility to share the Good News and teach those close to us about Christ.

We must continue to do what John the Baptist did. When his disciples were in doubt about who Jesus was, he sent them to the source. They had heard about all of the miracles that Jesus was performing. They had heard what the people were saying about Him. What they needed was to hear His Word and to feed on the Word of God.

They had heard of all His miraculous signs, but they did not make the connection between Jesus and the Messiah promised in the Old Testament.

When Jesus answers their question, “Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?” Jesus answers by pointing them to Isaiah the prophet.

700 years before the birth of Christ, Isaiah told what will happen when the Savior comes into the world: “Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy” [Is. 35:5-6].

Jesus answers the question “Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?” by directing their attention toward the Word of God. Jesus says: “Go and tell John what you hear and see: The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news preached to them.”

This passage has a parallel structure to Jesus’ words to His own disciples in the Great Commission: “Go ye therefore into all nations, baptizing in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit; and teaching them all that I have commanded you.”

English is a very sloppy language that doesn’t do this justice. We read “Go” as a command. It is not a command. It is not an imperative. For any grammar nerds that need to know, it’s a participle. The emphasis is on baptizing and teaching, not on going.

Likewise, Jesus tells John’s disciples, “tell John what you hear and see.” And then using Isaiah’s words, He points them to these exact events which you can read about in Matthew chapters 8,9, and 10 – including the Good News being preached by the 12 as He had sent them out.

John’s disciples could return and know that He was the One and there was no need to expect someone else. This was the Christ, the Son of God. They came to faith in Christ because the Word of God was opened to them.

It was the Word of God spoken through the prophet Isaiah, not the miracles, that convinced them of who Jesus was.

We sometimes think that it would take a miracle to convince certain people we know that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. But it is not through some outward event that faith is found. The miracle of faith occurs when the Word of God is opened to people and their blind eyes, for the first time, begin to see; their deaf ears, for the first time, hear; and the spiritually dead are raised to a new life in Christ.

In Christ's ministry, He certainly healed many people of their physical blindness and physical deafness. He raised Lazarus, the boy at Nain, and Jairus' daughter from the dead. However, that was not the focal point of His ministry.

Christ came into the world to preach the Good News of forgiveness, to open the eyes of the people who did not know they were blind. He came to unstop the ears of those who did not know they were deaf. And He came to bring life to the corpses walking around who thought they were alive, but were dead in their sin.

Do not be ashamed to share that Good News with those who are closest to you. The Word of God does open the eyes of the blind, and the dead have been raised. We are living proof of that. This new life that we have is only found in Christ and in His church. He is the One promised throughout the Old Testament. He is the One of whom the prophet Isaiah foretold. He is the Son of God and the Savior of the world. There is no need to look for someone else. Our task is to be prepared, stay awake, keep watch, for He who has come is coming once again. Amen.