

Matt 11: 2-11

Remembering the candle of the third Sunday of Advent – as we wait this advent, let us reflect and find the resurgence of the extraordinary JOY of knowing the Messiah Jesus Christ our Lord.

Oh Lord increase our faith! Amen

You know that team building exercise where one will hold out their arms as the other person will fall backwards trusting that the first will catch her safely? I confess I find that really hard...it isn't that I don't trust the person per se – I might know them really well and feel that they are intending the best. BUT, my doubt is that they are not actually able and will drop me. I do trust the intentions of people – possibly too much but as Jesus said 'I know what is in the heart of man' and he knows our frailties, and I, likewise fear that as I cannot always be trusted to follow through – others, even those I love may not be able to follow through. So I am fearful, anxious, uncertain.

Silly little thing in the grand scheme I know, after all there was poor old John the Baptist stuck in prison knowing that in all likelihood he will die...so he waits, fretful and afraid and for all his powerful proclamations and faith in Jesus Christ, the dark time undermines his trust and he doubts: 'Are you the one who is to come or are we to wait for another.' Is Jesus really the much anticipated Messiah? Is he going to rescue John?

We all identify with his feelings and probably have experienced sometime the same gloomy sense of uncertainty and doubt. Troubled times bring troubled minds. We think: "Is Jesus the one who was to come... is he going to follow through?' Even as we have proclaimed our faith in various ways.

I wonder what is your prison that causes you to doubt, to wonder, to feel insecure and question your faith in Jesus Christ's lordship? It isn't hard to hazard some guesses. We have experienced both individually and collectively some deeply troubling times recently: mental and physical health crises over the Covid pandemic. Political unrest all over the world – particularly as we see increasing polarization and lack of constructive or gracious dialogue. Financial turmoil that is particularly hitting the poor and vulnerable (but few are completely immune). How will we provide for our families...? We become fearful, anxious and ...doubtful. Is Jesus really THE one, our Lord, the saviour and provider?

Trying to be positive, we might remind ourselves of refiner's fire and how tough times help us to develop and mature. We might look at the garden and remember the necessity for pruning and manure, for the season of cold and little light for vigorous, fruitful growth to occur. But it still hurts. And then there is the 'Why me?' question when there is personal tragedy or sickness. But then we remember others and the broken world we inhabit and we feel humbled and ask: "hm yes, but why NOT me? What have I done when I am spared what is common to humanity?" But we still suffer consequences and struggle, and cry out: 'Where are you God?'

So how does Jesus respond. Well firstly to see that John is informed of what IS happening through the ministry of Christ. "Go and tell" Tell of the miracles you see performed. Be encouraged, great things are happening and the poor – the weak and the vulnerable are especially able to hear with everyone else that there is good news. All through the Bible is the refrain 'go and tell what God has done.' Write it down, pass it on, remind yourselves.

We are to tell our stories, share the good news. Not only is it bringing hope to others, it lifts our hearts and encourages our faith. And there is something especially lovely to be able to share the great things God is doing around us with our fellow believers. For instance, I love to tell that the fastest growing church in the world at present is believed to be Iran!

It is also hugely encouraging simply to reflect on the work of the creator around us in the natural world. Sure what God has made we know is *good* – but it is also bountifully unnecessarily beautiful! And love, generosity, kindness – we are made in God's image and it is there. Sometimes we simply need to point it out to those sitting in darkness. Being made in God's image we humans are capable of great creativity in glorious music, art, literature.

Anyway, back to the text, 'As they went away...' in obedience those messenger disciples have gone off to encourage John. Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John. What did you go to see? Obviously you wouldn't have bothered with a feeble reed shaken in the wind. So maybe a someone in flashy clothes and a fine talker? But no, like Jesus like John wasn't known for his appearance or his sartorial elegance. That wasn't what drew them. A prophet? There were lots around who filled that role – but Jesus pointed out that John was way more than that.

Isn't it lovely that Jesus is seemingly unperturbed by John's weak moment and speaks publically and highly of him quoting the OT, the word of God: "See I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you." "Truly I tell you 'Jesus says: 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.'" As an ordinary minister John is truly great in Jesus' economy. And yet, through the work of the one John proclaimed as Messiah – the kingdom of God broke into the ordinary world and the one reborn with the frailest mustard seed of faith in Christ was greater still.

We in our dark times – in our painful uncertain waiting doubting times – are still treasured in the eyes of Christ.

As Jesus encouraged John so John also encourages us. He does not allow his doubts to fester, he questions and seeks reassurance. It is OK to ask, OK to cry out 'where are you Lord'? Let us not add to the suffering by hiding our pain from our fellow believers who can help and pray.

The disciples are instructed to take back a message of 'see what the Lord has done'. Let us look at the wonders of creation, of healing.... Never mind we might not see many 'miraculous' healings now – but hey isn't medicine, surgery et al under the healing lordship of Christ? Let us give thanks for the way we are made and the way that God has given gifts to help healing others and so on.

When we doubt – let us look at the integrity of the compelling figure of Jesus Christ and what he has done, look around us and see what he continues to do and be assured that despite and sometimes because of the darkness, the light will continue to shine from Him, and let us grow in *trust*. And the joy will rise. 'If you have seen me, you have seen the Father.' Said Jesus – He IS Lord.

Amen