

Advent Week Two

Dec 7, 2025

Jeremiah 43:19-21; Matthew 11:1-11

What do you fear? when we're running out of hope, God is at work

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Opening Prayer

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be pleasing unto you, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Sermon

John the Baptist. He paved the way for Jesus' coming. Remember when Jesus came to the Jordan River and John the Baptist, who was the cousin of Jesus, was baptizing people as fast as it could be done. Jesus came along and asked John to baptize him. John replied that he was not worthy of baptizing. He wasn't even worthy to tie his sandals. He said that Jesus should be baptizing *him*. He proclaimed, "Behold, the Lamb of God!"

These two were tied from before birth. When Jesus' mother found out she was pregnant, she immediately went to spend time with her older cousin, Elizabeth, who was pregnant with who would become John the Baptist.

So why, when we come to this point, is this same John the baptist, not only sitting in jail, but also questioning whether Jesus is indeed the Savior. Is Jesus the One or should they be looking for another? What happened between then and now? Has John lost hope? Is he okay? Is it even okay even to ask such a question?

I can't imagine being John. I can't imagine having spent my life preparing the way for the One whom I knew with such confidence to be the Messiah, the Savior, the Promised One, only to find myself after decades of faithfulness, imprisoned under the thumb of the empire, facing certain death, and now feeling doubt creeping in.

Maybe John has been hearing whispers about things his rabbi cousin is doing. Maybe they're making their way through prison guards as rumors of unheard of happenings. Healings. People brought back to life. Crowds fed when there was next to no food to be had.

Maybe he heard about those things but found himself confused because the empire remained intact. Many expected the Messiah to bring down the empire and to free the Jewish people from their oppressed existence. The Messiah would be known by his actions in leading the oppressed nation in rebellion toward newfound freedom. But those were not the whispers he was hearing. There was nothing about insurrection. Nothing about national freedom. Nothing to indicate that his own sentence would be lifted. How could he, with hours to spend thinking and wondering in prison, how could he not wonder. And question. And doubt.

What is doubt like that? Is it a dereliction of faith and hope? Is it abandonment of belief? Is it betrayal?

But who among us has not experienced doubt? Perhaps deep doubt. Or perhaps doubt as a constant trickle—an uncomfortable companion on the journey of faith.

Jesus receives John's question and in his response there is no chastisement. There is no shame. There is no embarrassment at feeling questioned. Nor does Jesus simply hand John an answer. He doesn't outright tell him he is the One or name himself the Messiah. No, Jesus points to the facts...to the evidence. He sends John a message telling him what has been happening and let's John draw his own conclusion. Jesus never forces anyone to believe or to follow. "Tell John what you see. Tell him the sick are made well, the blind see, the lame walk."

I imagine that when John received this message, he must have trembled indeed. I'll bet his shoulders shook as tears ran down his face. What he believed in the core of his being but feared at some level might not be true, was confirmed by Jesus' words.

When Jesus communicates that these miraculous things are happening, Jesus assures John—and us as listeners now—that trembling hope is still hope. Trembling hope is still hope.

Jesus lists in this text these things happening that he had also quoted in Luke 4 when he set out his job description. And that Job description was taken from a passage from the prophet Isaiah. "the blind receive their sight,

the lame walk, lepers are cleansed,

the deaf hear, the dead are raised,

and the poor have good news brought to

them."

Our own questions might not be so far from John's questions. Don't we all want to know that things are getting better? Don't we want to know that we're making a difference. How do we look at the newspapers or news websites or news podcasts, hear of the way people are spoken about as garbage, women being called stupid as they seek to do fulfill their call and duty and dreams as journalists, women's choices being severely limited and due process skipped, and not feel like our work over the decades has been in vain?

It's hard to spend one's life as a clergy person and regularly see the numbers of those who attend church falling.

It's hard to be a social worker among the unstably housed and watch the numbers of those without housing increase year over year.

It's hard to be one who works among refugees who have become wonderful American citizens and hear them maligned and talked about as less than.

It's hard to be a medical professional and know that for every person healed, another will find themselves in need of healing.

It's hard to be a church who found its call in working toward people of all genders and sexual orientations being allowed to be fully affirmed by the church only to see members of the queer community feeling unsafe in our cities.

And we could continue.

Jesus' response to John calls us to look beyond the overwhelm and to seek out signs of God's kingdom. We may not yet see it in its fullness, but the signs are everywhere.

Healing does happen. And so does deep, difficult, honoring care of those reaching life's end.

We see injustice in the way immigrants and even citizens are treated, but we see a glimpse of hope when inflatable frogs show up, exposing power by using peaceful and ridiculous humor. Or when clergy show up and hold a service with Christmas carols outside of where people are detained because they insist that there is yet hope.

We rejoice when a person finds their footing or a family finds healing thanks to therapy and/or medication.

We give thanks when we hear that another person has found health insurance.

And in these glimpses of goodness and mercy and encouragement and hope, we could also go on. Because the Kin-dom of God is at hand.

In our passage from Jeremiah today, God says, "Behold! I am doing a new thing. Do you not perceive it?"

God is not disappointed. Jesus saw John's crumbling faith not as failure, but as part of what made him faithful.

If you find yourself with trembling faith this season—or ever—our call is not to manufacture faith. Not to fake it. When you feel that tremble, take a deep breath in. A deep breath out. And

then look. Perceive. Look. Listen. Find where there's a glimmer. And know that God is doing a new thing. A new thing is springing forth. And in your prayers and in whatever way you are called, help it grow.

Look again. Listen again. Perceive.

Amen.