

Week of April 11, 2021

Matthew 11:1-19

¹ When Jesus finished teaching his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in their cities. ² Now when John heard in prison about the things the Christ was doing, he sent word by his disciples to Jesus, asking, ³ "Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?" ⁴ Jesus responded, "Go, report to John what you hear and see. ⁵ Those who were blind are able to see. Those who were crippled are walking. People with skin diseases are cleansed. Those who were deaf now hear. Those who were dead are raised up. The poor have good news proclaimed to them. ⁶ Happy are those who don't stumble and fall because of me." ⁷ When John's disciples had gone, Jesus spoke to the crowds about John: "What did you go out to the wilderness to see? A stalk blowing in the wind? ⁸ What did you go out to see? A man dressed up in refined clothes? Look, those who wear refined clothes are in royal palaces. ⁹ What did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. ¹⁰ He is the one of whom it is written: Look, I'm sending my messenger before you, who will prepare your way before you. ¹¹ I assure you that no one who has ever been born is greater than John the Baptist. Yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. ¹² From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven is violently attacked as violent people seize it. ¹³ All the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John came. ¹⁴ If you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come. ¹⁵ Let the person who has ears, hear. ¹⁶ To what will I compare this generation? It is like a child sitting in the marketplaces calling out to others, ¹⁷ 'We played the flute for you and you didn't dance. We sang a funeral song and you didn't mourn.' ¹⁸ For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.' ¹⁹ Yet the Human One came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look, a glutton and a drunk, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.' But wisdom is proved to be right by her works."

Reflections from the Dark

When we are in a dark place, it can be very easy to be overwhelmed by anxiety and fear. You lose your job and you might think, "what will I ever make of myself?" You end a relationship and you might think, "who will ever love me?" The darkness of our situation tends to amplify our feelings, usually for the worse. A therapist might call this behavior "spiraling" and it can be very destructive because it causes you to lose sense of reality and any semblance of hope. John the Baptist has found himself in prison - for what it is unclear from Matthew - and he is in his own dark place. Remember just months, or possibly years, before this, John was preaching his fiery message in the wilderness and attracting huge crowds and baptizing many people, including Jesus. Jesus seemed to fit the bill of what John knew his call to be - to prepare the way for the coming messiah. But in prison, with a grim outlook on life, he doubted everything. To find some sense of reality, he sent disciples to Jesus to find out the truth.

Jesus didn't offer a simple yes or no answer. And who can blame him? When we're spiraling out of fear we usually need more than a yes or no to end our downward descent. We need something to bring us back to reality, so it needs to be grounded in something we can wrap our minds around. For John, Jesus knew words wouldn't do it, but actions could. So he asked John's disciples to report to John the actions that had followed Jesus' ministry - profound acts of healing, even the resurrection of the dead. Actions will always speak louder than words, which is why there are cliches built off that very premise. Once John's disciples left with their message, Jesus turned to the crowds with a lesson - and it's a lesson for us, too. What we see might not live into our expectations. John certainly didn't for many, yet he was among the greatest prophets. Despite his obvious piety, he was still derided as a kook and ended up in prison. He wasn't what was expected by those in power, so he wasn't accepted. But Jesus has called us to ignore our preconceptions and look to the actions. Actions speak volumes. Action is where we find truth.

When we're in our own dark places and have doubts about even our most deeply held beliefs, we, too, look for action to get us out of the funk. We have all experienced the joys of reconciliation and the peace that comes from deep love. We have all seen the truth of our faith in

action. And it's that action that guides our lives. When we don't know what else to hold on to, we receive the same message relayed to John the Baptist - look for the truth in action.

God of action, we offer you our praise for your good works - the work of creation, the work of redemption, and the continued work sustaining our lives. Help us to see your activity in this world. May we trust in it and in our call to model it in our own actions. In Christ's name we pray, Amen.