

---

## *Are You the One Who Is to Come?*

**A sermon by the Very Reverend Sam Candler**  
**Atlanta, Georgia**  
**The Third Sunday of Advent - Year A**

*"Are you the one who is to come, or shall we wait for another?" --Matthew 11:3*

We say that the season of Advent is a season of waiting. We try to persuade ourselves that if we just say that often enough, it will become true. Advent is a season of waiting. Advent is a season of waiting.

But it's not. Advent is a season of impatience. Sure, there are other times throughout the year when we experience impatience. But this season, the time between Thanksgiving and Christmas, this season is the climax of impatience, when all our anxiety and hurry and worry are concentrated into four short weeks.

We are busy preparing, each of us in our individual way, for something special to happen to us. Is this the right gift, or shall we seek another? Is this the right way for me to serve the poor, or shall I seek another? Is this the party I was waiting for, or is it another one? Is this the moment with my family that I was waiting for, or was I waiting for something else?

The horrible possibility lies in the back of our mind that our expectation will indeed go unfulfilled "" that what we are waiting for will never happen "" that we will forever sit lonely and empty by the side of the road like Vladimir and Estragon waiting for Godot. Or waiting lonely by the window like Eleanor Rigby.

Or like John the Baptist, waiting in prison. Yes, John the Baptist. John the Baptist is back today, speaking differently than he did last week.

In last week's gospel lesson, he burst on the scene with fire and vengeance, full of confidence and certainty. He announced the coming of Jesus with great hope and expectation. He gave us a fairly accurate model for Advent, full of energy, like children decorating the Christmas tree!

But today, he represents Advent in another way, in a way that is just as authentic as last week's style. He is tired. He is discouraged. He questions. John the Baptist is like us. He jumps to hope with power and aggressiveness. But then, he has questions; he even has doubts.

Listen to John the Baptist later in his ministry. He thought he knew Jesus. After all, he supposedly baptized him in the River Jordan. He was eager and energetic just last week. But then, time went by. Things got harder for John. In today's passage, from Matthew 11, Jesus has begun his ministry, and John has been cast into prison by Herod the Great. He begins to have his doubts. Is Jesus really the one he was looking for?

What happened to the vivid forecasts of John the Baptist that Jesus would chop down fruitless trees and throw chaff into the fire? Has Jesus spent his ministry throwing chaff into the fire? No, it seems not. And so John sends several of his own people, his own disciples, to ask the poignant question, "Are you he who is to come, or shall we wait for another?" John has devoted his entire ministry, even gives his very life, to preparing the way for Jesus Christ, but John does not even recognize

Jesus when he comes.

John the Baptist is a prophet because he shows us so clearly what happens to our narrow expectations. Jesus Christ came for John the Baptist, but Jesus came in a way that John did not expect.

At least John did have sense enough to ask the right question: "Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another?"

Yes, that is the Advent question, "Are you the one I've been waiting for, or shall I wait for another?" Is this the present I've been waiting for? Is this the party, is this the family reunion, is this the date I've been waiting for? Is this the job I really wanted? Is this really the house we wanted so desperately two years ago? Is this really the person I loved four years ago? Is this really the person I love now?

We will find a precious gift, the gift the Christ,-- we will find reconciliation and peace""if we have eyes to see beyond our expectations""if we look around us and notice new places where Jesus is working. "Go and tell John what you see and hear," said Jesus. "The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk. The dead are raised up, and the poor have the good news preached to them."

Jesus Christ did not come to those people who had the details of his arrival all worked out. He came to the blind, the lame, the lepers, the deaf, the poor, the dead. He came to the downtrodden. He came in humility for the humble. He came for those who didn't have it all worked out for themselves. He came for those who knew they needed Him.

When I was a little boy, all the presents I thought I wanted, I opened early. They were also the earliest to fade away. It was those last little presents under the tree that often lasted the longest. The presents I now remember in the fondest way were not the ones I wrote down on my Christmas list.

There comes a moment when we know the children have grown up. It happens when they stop making Christmas lists for themselves. Remember how long and delicious those lists used to be?

Some of us have grown up only recently. We have the house we always wanted. We have the job security we wanted. We have that spouse, that husband or wife, who is the answer to all our dreams. We even have the car we wanted. We got our children into good schools.

But is that all there is? Is this what we were waiting for?

Listen to what Jesus told John's disciples when they asked that question. Jesus said, "When you get me, the lame walk, the blind receive their sight, the dead are raised, the poor get good news." What did all that mean? It meant that John's disciples, who had already repented and turned around once, were going to have to repent and turn around again.

It meant that Jesus comes to reverse things. What was dead is now raised. What was blind now sees. What was lame now walks. When we get the gift of Jesus, our lives are changed. The sign that Jesus has come is that people are changed.

Do we really want the gift of Christ this year? We will recognize the gift of Jesus when we recognize that people have changed. We will recognize the gift of Jesus when we recognize that we must change, too. The spiritual word for that change is repentance, to turn around.

No matter how young or old we are, whether we are waiting to receive that perfect bicycle, waiting to receive that special answer from our loved one, waiting for that special moment of reconciliation with our children or with our parents, we are also waiting ultimately for the Christ, the Savior.

Christ the Savior will change us. Christ the Savior will turn us around. Even if we've changed before, even if we've repented before, Christ the Savior will raise the dead again. Christ the Savior is born.

AMEN.

The Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler  
Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip

---

© *The Cathedral of St. Philip. All rights reserved.*