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

**A sermon by Dean Sam Candler**  
**Advent 3 – Year A**

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

December. Advent. Two weeks before Christmas.

We are busy preparing, each of us in our individual way, for something special to happen. 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 dreadful possibility lies in the back of our mind that our expectation will indeed go unfulfilled — that whatever 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 in prison. For John the Baptist is back today, speaking differently than he did last week.

In last Sunday’s gospel lesson, John the Baptist burst upon 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 good model for Advent, full of energy, like children decorating the Christmas tree, or like a newly ordained preacher.

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

Listen to John the Baptist, here in Matthew, chapter eleven, later in John’s ministry. He thought he knew Jesus. After all, he supposedly baptized him in the River Jordan. But then, time went by. Things got harder for John. In today’s story, 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, after Jesus has arrived, John seems not to recognize Jesus.

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 in a way that John did not expect.

Yes, John did have sense enough to ask the right question: “Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another?” And, to his credit, he asks the question directly.

It 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?

What, exactly, are we expecting? We will find a precious gift, the gift of the Christ – we will find reconciliation and peace – if we have eyes to see beyond our expectations. “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. He came for us.

When I was young, 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.

Remember how long and delicious those Christmas lists used to be? But then, we grew up. Some of us now 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 the right 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 blind receive their sight, the dead are raised, the poor get good news.” What did all that mean? It meant that when Jesus comes around, things change.

It meant that Jesus comes to change things. What was dead is now raised. What was blind now sees. When we get the gift of Jesus, our lives are changed. The sign that Jesus has come is that people are changed. And that change, that moment, can happen anytime! It can happen right now, even two weeks before Christmas!

I hope you all know by now, that John the Baptist got a lot of things wrong. He is just like us. He got some things right. He got some things wrong. Just like us.

He wondered if this was it. From his prison cell, remembering all his previous forecasts, and all the ways he had imagined the Christ, he asks the dire question, “Are you the one I was waiting for?”

And the answer is, Yes! Yes, This is it. Right now. Not before. Not later. Now. This is the party, the dinner, the gathering – the moment! – you wanted, if you open your eyes. This is the house, the job, the church, the people, where Christ is, if we open our eyes. This, right now, is the moment you were waiting for with the person you love. Are you the one I was waiting for? Yes, with Christ, you are!

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.

The Christ arrives when we stop asking whether this is the one, and we realize that, yes, this is indeed the one! No matter who it is, right in front of us. After we were blind to that person, we see! After we were stumbling around that person, we walk! After we thought we were dead at that gathering, we live!

Are you the one I was waiting for? Yes, in Christ, you are!

Christ the Savior is born!

AMEN.

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