

# Daily Discipleship

## Third Sunday of Advent (A) – Matthew 11:2-11

**Discipleship:** *Following the Messiah*

**Focus Question:** *How are you waiting for the Messiah?*

### word of life

**“When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, ‘Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?’”** Matthew 11:2 (NRSV)

Read Matthew 11:2-11

In Matthew 3:1-17, we are introduced to John the Baptist as he prepares the way of the Lord and baptizes Jesus. John is not only clear about his own identity as a humble messenger who precedes God’s Messiah, but also the identity of Jesus. Even though John the Baptist and Jesus are cousins, John believes he is unworthy to untie the sandals of God’s Anointed – Jesus Christ.

John the Baptist reappears in the Gospel of Matthew in chapter 11. We learn John is in prison, but there are no details concerning the reason or length of his imprisonment. John hears of the activities of Jesus and is able to get a message to Jesus through his own disciples. John wants to know, “Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?” (Matthew 11:2 NRSV) It can be unsettling for us to hear of doubts and questions coming from John the Baptist, a man of such conviction. Perhaps John expects to see more visible and immediate signs of God’s reign. Perhaps John does not expect to be persecuted while Jesus ministers and pursues God’s mission.

1. *How do you explain the question by John the Baptist?*
2. *Is it possible that prison life has eroded John’s faith? Why or why not?*
3. *Could he be asking this question for the sake of his disciples? How so?*

Throughout the New Testament Jesus is given a variety of titles and names, including *Messiah*, a Hebrew word translated as “Anointed One”. (The Greek translation is *Christ*.) This title carries much significance for the Jews who over centuries had heard the prophets speak of God anointing someone to come and rule with God’s wisdom and justice. The Jews had waited with much expectation for the appearance of the Messiah and the beginning of the Messianic Age. John wants to know if their waiting is over. If so, when will Jesus take charge?

The key to this passage is the response by Jesus: “Go and tell John what you hear and see:” (Matthew 11:4 NRSV) Jesus is a man of words and compassionate actions. He embodies the hopes of a Messiah described in Isaiah 35:1-10. Nevertheless, some expect the Messiah to act with more authority and claim power in this world in ways different than those exhibited by Jesus.

4. *What might the disciples of John tell him on their return?*
5. *How might John the Baptist respond?*

After John’s disciples return to share their findings with John the Baptist, Jesus speaks about the identity of John the Baptist. Even though John questions and perhaps doubts the identity of Jesus, the reverse is not true. Jesus is clear about the role of John and affirms him as the one who has prepared the way for the Messiah. In fact, Jesus knows no one greater than John the Baptist, but note the paradox. Jesus states “yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.” (Matthew 11:11 NRSV)

6. *What have you learned about John the Baptist in this lesson?*
7. *How can John be the “greatest and the least”?*

## **word among us**

The congregation had endured more conflict than any member cared to remember. At one point, members gathered to discuss whether they should close their church. No one could quite figure out why they could not get moving to be a healthy vibrant faith community. Reluctantly, the congregation called a seminarian to serve as their pastor, but no one expected much from this young man. They decided to give him a few years. Perhaps he could help them close their church in a respectful manner.

Much to their surprise, the young pastor preached passionately, cared for the sick with compassion, and taught with wisdom beyond his years. God's Spirit began to bubble up in unexpected ways and joy slowly filled their sanctuary. The transformation was striking. Yet some charter members refused to return, but would ask church members about the congregation. The response was, "Come, hear and see. There is joy. Love is shared. The good news of Jesus Christ is proclaimed."

1. *Why do congregations get themselves embroiled in conflict?*
2. *What are signs of a vibrant congregation?*
3. *What are signs of a vibrant disciple of Jesus Christ?*

For centuries, the Jews had anticipated the coming of God's anointed – the Messiah (Hebrew) and Christ (Greek). The Messiah would launch the Messianic Age, a time when the desert would blossom, overflowing with water. People would rejoice with singing as the blind see and the deaf hear. There would be no more sorrow or sighing, but everlasting joy would reign. (See Isaiah 35:1-10 for references.) This time of miraculous transformation comes only as God acts in our world bringing in a new age.

4. *How do you imagine the time when Jesus will come again?*
5. *Imagine someone asking you, "Is Jesus worth waiting for?" How would you respond?*

Today, we live in between the times of when the Messiah came and when the Messiah will come again. Christ has come. Christ will come again. Thus, we experience in part the joy, hope, and transformation of Jesus, but we realize we do not live in a time of final fulfillment. We continue to walk and live by faith.

God continues to be at work in this world and in our own lives, committed to transforming our personal deserts into gardens overflowing with joy. The good news proclaimed by Jesus to the poor includes us as poor sinners trapped by our own sin. Jesus continues to give us sight and insight, opening our ears and cleansing us. The dead are raised from the death. We who are thirsty are given drink. We who are hungry are fed.

6. *What does God desire for your life?*
7. *How is God transforming your life?*
8. *How has God blessed your life during the last week?*

### **Prayer**

Messiah, you are God's anointed and desire to come into our lives. Come, transform our deserts into joy and dancing. Thanks be to God. Amen

### **Dig Deeper**

Isaiah 35:1-10

## ***last word***

Look around and give thanks for the ways  
God is at work in your life.



*Daily Discipleship*

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