

Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be always acceptable in your sight O Lord our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Last week we read of John the Baptist at the beginning of his ministry. He's baptizing people in the River Jordan. This week we again encounter John . . . but this time he's in prison. . . and he's full of doubt. . . full of questions about himself and about his cousin, Jesus. The reports he gets from his followers when they come to the prison at visiting hours is that Jesus is not acting like the Messiah should act. He is not following tradition. He is not observing the law. He is not what they expected.

His disciples tell John that Jesus is going to parity. That he's been seen hanging out with prostitutes. That he is friendly with those despised tax collectors. He's eating and drinking with these undesirables. So John sends his disciples to Jesus to ask. Are you the one to come. Or are we to wait for another? Are you the one to come? Or do we wait for someone else. And I believe that is the question for every one of us here this morning.

Jesus. Are you the one? And first blush without much thought, we might quickly say well of course. Jesus is the Messiah . . . but let's not be so fast with our answer. If this Jesus really is the good news of God. . . then why is there still so much suffering and pain evil and destruction hurt and brokenness in God's creation.

This season of Advent is one of paradox. All too often you and I like things to be all cut and dried. All too often we think that's the stuff of Christianity. It's this way and that's it. But paradox, is part and parcel of faith.

Michael Blake wrote in his book the tent maker. One of the essential paradoxes of Advent is that while we wait for God, we are with God all along. That while we need to be reassured of God's arrival or the arrival of our homecoming. . . we are already at home. While we wait, we have to trust to have faith, but it is God's grace that gives us that faith.

As with all spiritual knowledge two things are true and equally true, at once. The mind can't grasp paradox. It is the knowledge of the soul. It is the knowledge of the soul.

And so here we are on this third Sunday in Advent. . . We are seekers who have been found. . . We ask questions, when we have the answer. In today's Gospel lesson John the Baptist is in prison and more ways than one. And in that darkness he is engaged in what all of us must come to. John and the boughs of Herod's jail is us and he is the prototype of Advent hope. He lives in the dark world, between what is and what is hoped for. Are you the one? And how does Jesus answer John's question? You go and tell John what you hear and see. The blind receive their sight the lame walk the lepers are cleansed the deaf hear the dead are raised and the people have good news brought to them. And when they heard Jesus answer. They knew what he was proclaiming. Because they remembered the words of the prophet Isaiah when he described Messiah. He will come and save you. . . then the eyes of the blind will be opened. . . the ears of the deaf unstopped. . . then the lame shall leap like a deer and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.

For those with ears to hear and understand it was clear. Jesus was saying in no uncertain terms. Yes. I am the promised one. I AM Messiah.

Now remember. The prevalent belief in Jesus religious world was that the people he mentioned weren't fit. . . .weren't fit for the community of faith. . . . the blind.. . the lame the deaf. . . .the leper. . . . all of these people were excluded because they weren't whole. They were blemished. They were not acceptable. Jesus was saying by word and by action. All are acceptable to Him. All are acceptable to Him. He makes them whole.. . . He makes them acceptable. . . . He saves them by His love and power. But let's face it. Those are not the categories by which we discriminate and judge people today. You know we live in a world where people are often divided into two categories. They are either, well to do, popular, well-connected and valuable. Or they are those who are down and out for one reason or another and are not valued.

The Lord of life. . . . the Jesus, I know. . . . says to you and to me and to all people regardless of how unacceptable the world might think they are, He says you are acceptable.

And when we hear that good news there will be some changes in our lives. Less judging more loving. . . less criticism more acceptance. The changes that Jesus showed to John's disciples move people from despair to hope. From Darkness to Light. From limping to leaping from sickness to wellness from death to life.

The message. John proclaimed was simple. Repent. . . . change Messiah is coming. . . .and Jesus is the one who came, and changed everything. Our whole outlook on life is changed., because we can see ourselves as beloved. . . . and we can see others as beloved. No longer are there those among us who may be labeled as unacceptable or outcasts of the human family. Jesus accepts and changes all who come to him.

This Holy season of Advent is a time of watching and waiting. A time of realizing that God never gives up on us. It is a time of expectation. A time that prepares us for the birth of the one who comes to declare us beloved, accepted and empowered. Beloved by our God. Accepted by our God. And empowered by our God to love and accept others. . . . . *Amen.*