

## “Are you the one?”

December 16, 2007

Text: *Isaiah 35:3-10, Matthew 11:2-11*

### I.

What’s engaging about this reading from Matthew 11 is how Jesus seems to be put to the test: ***Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?***

In many ways, that’s a loaded question, loaded with huge expectation and hope. Are you the one?

- The one to save Israel ...
- the one God will use to eliminate the Roman occupation ...
- and to remove the glaring disproportion between the rich and the poor.

Are you the one, or are we to wait for another?

What’s Jesus going to say? Whether he is or isn’t *the one*, isn’t it all a part of a process? Doesn’t he have to discover for himself what it all means? Is he the one? That’s enormous pressure ... and then, the stress that follows.

The other side of the expectation is the very poignant vulnerability. What if we fail, and don’t make the mark? But strangely, perhaps, the vulnerability is good. It’s what makes us human and, therefore, open to change and to a *deepening* that leads to personal growth.

Interestingly, Jesus seems to take the question of John’s disciples in stride. He doesn’t over react, or get defensive. He doesn’t become argumentative. He sort of says,

*Well, what do you think? Check it out ...and just 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 poor have good news brought to them ...**

Sure sounds like GOOD NEWS to me ... the hand of love is everywhere ...

### II.

We can tell when Christmas is in our hearts because everything around us is made new and transformed. Everything around us is *touched* by hope’s prospects.

Hope—always, of course—is at the heart of our Christian faith. It is where Christmas takes us. All of our readings this morning, from the scriptures, vibrate with the language

of HOPE. They paint a vision of a better world, a vision we must always aspire towards ... and must never give up on.

We just heard Jesus in Matthew's gospel, reminding John's disciples of the transformation that is ongoing (as in, *right now*): ***the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the deaf hear*** and so forth.

The **Psalmist** (Psalm 146) talks about the God who executes justice for the oppressed, gives food to the hungry ... sets the prisoners free, opens the eyes of the blind ... and lifts up those who are bowed down.

And Isaiah says, in the grip of a wrenching darkness and seemingly endless grief (this is the historical period of the Exile, off in Babylon), *there is a way ... A highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Holy Way ... the unclean shall not travel on it ... but it shall be for God's people.*

These are messages of hope ... hope born out of vulnerability and fear. Sometimes, the days of our lives—the weeks as they unfold—can be so discouraging and disappointing ... and our fears and anxieties and stress can seem too much.

But Isaiah says, *there's a way. This is not the end ... this is not all there is.* If you're having a tough day in life, going through a tough time, do NOT give up. Do not grieve prematurely.

With God, you see, friends, it's never over. Our lives are always in the process of becoming. But it's a process riddled with vulnerability; and *vulnerability* is the birth parent of hope. When we're in a vulnerable situation, we're hopeful that things will improve and we're motivated to do all we can ... and our creative juices get engaged.

### III.

In the Christmas story, there's *vulnerability* everywhere. Look, for example, where Jesus was born and the threatening world around him. Yet, it's the *vulnerability* that draws us in. Vulnerability always prompts a reaction in us: ***what are we gonna do?***

We have choices to make? It's a competitive world ... mounting pressure all the time to win, make a profit, rise to the top.

So, do we do *steroids* or take drugs to try and gain an edge, or keep up, or whatever it is? In other words, do we cheat and, along the way, compromise our integrity and human dignity ... our sense of what is *right* and *moral*?

*What do we do?* Or do we respond to the *vulnerability* in another way? By going deeper ... and allowing it to engage our imagination ... that we might, by the grace of God, be moved beyond our obsession with *immediate gratification*.

Part of our problem in America is that we have so much abundance, that we too easily feel sorry for ourselves. We lose sight of the BIG PICTURE ... of what's at stake in the long run and, mired in self-centeredness, we make bad choices.

#### IV.

**Are you the one?** Along with Jesus, our answer to that question is found in the fruits of our lives. In the impact we have on the world around us.

Every day, what we do makes a difference. It helps define the world we choose to live in. How big a world? How welcoming, how inclusive? How open to the *vulnerable* love that comes to us through the birth of the infant at Bethlehem.

Christmas feeds the expectation that rises up from Jesus' birth ... that all the world (and each of us has to start with ourselves) will be moved to *be generous ... charitable ... forgiving ...and to have a BIG spirit and share a BIG love ...*

**And then the eyes of the blind shall be opened ... and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then the lame shall leap like a deer ... and waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert.**

**O what a day!**

**And a highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Holy Way.** And it can save the world and make all things news.

*All praise be unto God! Amen!*

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