

Shortly before he was executed, while he waited in King Herod's jail, John the Baptist sent a message to Jesus. "Are you the Messiah," John wanted to know? "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" It was a natural question, given John's status as a prisoner, because he wanted assurance that his work of preparing the way for Jesus Christ had not been in vain.

Our Lord answered John's messenger this way: "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."

We need to understand two things about this exchange between Jesus and John. Jesus wanted to reassure John by telling him that his work was not in vain. Jesus was and is the fulfillment of the messianic promise. It seems to me, though, that we find the heart of the Gospel in the statement that "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." That "good news," to the poor in spirit, is that Jesus Christ was and is the perfect fulfillment of God's promise, conveyed by the ancient prophets, to redeem and restore us so that we will stand as righteous people in the very presence of Almighty God. The Evangelist John, not John the Baptist, tells us God sent his Son to us because he loves us. He tells us that God sent his Son to us to save us. He sent his Son to take upon himself weight of our sins. Jesus said to us, "Take my yoke, for it is light. I'll carry yours for you, and I'll place it at the foot of the Cross."

John the Baptist proclaimed the coming of this "good news" in the form of God's own Son. And John told people that because the Messiah was drawing near, they needed to make a pathway in their souls for him. In other words, they needed to prepare to receive Jesus in faith, so that through faith they could receive God's grace. Advent is a time, a season, for such preparation, but Advent is more than just four weeks before Christmas. Advent is a season that ought to fill a lifetime; we can never prepare, enough, to meet Christ face to face. And we shall meet him face to face. That is a given. The only question for us is how will that meeting go?

The Advent message for this Sunday is that the meeting time is close. Three of the four Advent candles are burning. We are coming close to lighting the Christ candle, the center candle in our wreath. That candle tells us that Christ is here. In our lives, we are coming closer and closer each day, each hour of every day, to lighting that candle, that light of Christ that must burn in our hearts if we are to come prepared for our meeting with Jesus.

We await our ultimate meeting with Jesus, but at the same time we are called to walk hand in hand with him, now. We can not be passive. The message of this third Sunday in Advent is when we choose to walk with Jesus, good things happen. We become, like John the Baptist, a messenger of God's "good news" of Christ. Christ's work becomes

our work as we become the arms and hands of the Risen Lord, doing his work in this world, bringing the “good news” of Jesus Christ to those around us. We are called to be healers, of the spiritually deaf, the spiritually blind, and the spiritually lame. We can make a difference in this world because, through us, the poor in spirit hear the “good news” that Jesus Christ is Lord, and in hearing and responding, the spiritually dead find new life. The word “Gospel,” by the way, is the derivative of the old-English word god-spell, or “good tidings”, what we loosely translate as “good news.” As disciples, we are bearers of the Gospel, the “good news” about Jesus; we are evangelists of of the Cross.

*Amen.*