

## Shall We Look For Another?

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A sermon preached by Ted Atkinson, Minister, Oxford Presbyterian Church, Oxford, PA on the third Sunday in Advent, December 17, 1989. Scripture Lessons: Isaiah 35:1-10; Psalm 146:5-10; James 5:7-10; Matthew 3:1-12.

**IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.**

A frazzled mother sits down at the dinner table with her 8 year old daughter. The mother took the day off from work to Christmas shop for her daughter. The top item on her girl's Christmas list was a very special doll that did all sorts of things. Her mother looked in the local stores. No luck. She went to a nearby mall. No luck. Finally, as Christmas approached, she began to panic. She took the day off and travelled forty miles to a large city where she searched through store after store until finally she found the doll, probably the only place in the world where it was sold. She came home, wrapped it, picked up her daughter from the baby sitter and took her out for dinner. While the girl was eating she said, "Mom, I think I'm getting too old for dolls. What I'd really like for Christmas is a nice ski sweater." Her mother thinks, "Oh no. I'm going to have to look for another gift."

We live in a world of unfulfilled hopes and dreams. Our reach exceeds our grasp. Our visions are so much more glorious than reality. We live in a world where people are always asking, "Should we look for another?" How often have we longed for something only to discover when we've gotten it we're disappointed. Should we look for another gift? Should we look for another job? Should we look for another boy-friend or girl-friend? Should we look for another husband or wife? Should we look for another church or even another Savior?

John the Baptist was looking for another Messiah. He was hoping for a Christmas present, the Messiah, but disappointed when the Messiah turned

out to be Jesus.

Earlier in the Gospel of St. Matthew, in a passage read last week, John spoke of a Messiah who would burn up the wicked with unquenchable fire. But Jesus was a friend of sinners. He forgave their sins and healed them. John was an ascetic. He fasted for long periods of time and he expected the Messiah to do the same. But Jesus came eating and drinking and performed his first miracle at a wedding reception where he turned water to wine. So John was confused. He sent his disciples to Jesus to ask, "Are you the one John said was going to come, or should we look for another?"

Then came Jesus's answer, "Go and tell John what you are hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is he who takes no offense at me."

In affect Jesus is saying, "I may not be what you expect. I may not be what you want. But I'm what this world needs and I'm what you need." "Take a fresh look at the Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah, John, and you will see that I'm whom God promised long ago. You need not look for another."

When the early Christians read the Old Testament, the only bible they had, they began to see how Old Testament passages which had never before applied to the Messiah were fulfilled in Jesus. The early Christians heard and saw things in the bible that were always there but they could be understood only in the light of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

But Jesus was also telling John the Baptist, "Judge me by what you see me doing." William Barclay writes, "Jesus demanded that there should be applied to him the most acid of tests, that of deeds. Jesus was the only person who could ever demand without qualification to be judged, not by

what he said, but by what he did. The challenge of Jesus is still the same. He doesn't so much say, 'Listen to what I have to tell you,' as, 'Look what I can do for you; see what I have done for others.'

It seems to me that if the church is the Body of Christ then we, too, should be able to point to what Jesus is doing today for the blind, the deaf, the lame, the poor, the dead. I say that with a little bit of reservation because though the Church is the Body of Christ, it is not Christ. As individual members of his body we are weak and fallible and sinful. It would be the height of arrogance for us to point to ourselves and to our ministry in the same way that Jesus pointed to his deeds. Nevertheless, People should be able to look at an authentic church and say, "The blind are receiving their sight there. Deaf people are able to hear when they go to that church. Lame people find no impediments when they go to that church."

I believe that "The things that Jesus did in Galilee he still does. In him those who were blind to the truth about themselves, about their (neighbors) and about God, have their eyes opened; in him those whose feet were never strong enough to remain in the right way are strengthened; in him those who were stained with the disease of sin are cleansed; in him those who were deaf to the voice of conscience and of God begin to listen; in him those who are dead and powerless in sin are raised to newness and loveliness of life; in him the poorest (person) inherits the riches of the love of God."

Years ago there was a television series produced by the BBC (I think) entitled, "Men Seeking God." During the series the interviewer, Christopher Mayhew, questioned representatives of all the major religions of the world concerning the ways in which they sought God and how they thought he could best be revealed to people. The Muslim took him to a mosque at the

time of praying as the masses bowed in that attitude of 'submission' which is the literal meaning of the word "Islam". The Hindu showed him the ritual of sacrifice inside the temple. The Jew read to him in a synagogue the sacred writings of the prophets. Then came the turn of the Christian, an Indian. He took Mayhew not to a Church, nor even to the Bible, but into a home for lepers. As the camera ranged over the deformed and disfigured patients who had once been discarded by society but who were now gathered into a community, he said that it was in those faces that he saw the beauty of Jesus, transfiguring them, changing them 'from glory into glory' not only as they received healing but even more as they knew themselves loved and accepted for Jesus's sake.

It was the same kind of evidence that Jesus gave when he was asked by John the Baptist's disciples whether he was indeed the One sent from God. He replied in terms of things that were happening-- the blind receiving sight, the lame walking, the deaf hearing-- activities that were evidence of God's presence among his people for those who were prepared to recognize him. Here was good news which the poorest, the simplest, the humblest could hear if no stumbling block were put in their way.

As I've thought about this passage I've wondered what people will see and hear when our new sanctuary is built. Will people look at our new church and say, "You can tell just by looking at that church that blind people aren't really welcome there because even a person who sees can't tell how to get into the church. If you're hard of hearing, don't go there. You won't understand a word spoken. You can tell that church isn't for lame people. Look at all the obstacles that a person in a wheel chair would have to go through to attend a service there. You can tell that church isn't for poor people. It's for people who are well to do."

Or will people and do people see something of the ministry of Jesus being carried out through us? Will they, are they, able to say of us, "Those people are not ashamed of Jesus. Jesus is working through them continuing his ministry."