

"Are you the One?"

Matthew 11:2-11

December 12, 2010

There is a Peanuts comic strip Lucy is speaking with Linus at the base of a hill. She says, "Someday I'm going over that hill and find the answer to my dreams.... Someday I'm going over that hill and find hope and fulfillment. I think, for me, all the answers to life lie beyond these clouds and over the grassy slopes of that hill!" Linus removes his thumb from his mouth, points toward the hill, and responds: "Perhaps there's another little kid on the other side of that hill who is looking this way and thinking that all the answers to life lie on this side of the hill." Lucy looks at Linus, then turns toward the hill and yells, "Forget it, kid!"

We are a people of great hopes, dreams and expectations. Somewhere, somehow we look for those hopes to be realized. Often we think that everything we long for is just around the corner, just over the next hill. And it is a good thing. Those hopes drive us forward. They push us to keep moving. They keep us dreaming - keep us living.

The ancient Israelites believed that one day, just around the corner, just over the next hill, there was a savior who would fulfill all of their dreams. Just around the corner they would encounter the savior who would make their lives worth the living. Their nations would be restored and their personal fortunes would change Everything would be better. So they hung on through tough times ... Waiting and watching.

When the angel of the Lord announced the coming birth to Mary and Joseph I can only imagine what they must have thought. I am sure that there would have been many personal concerns. But at the same time, they must have imagined what it might be like if it was true and the messiah was finally about to arrive. Oh how their imaginations must have soared. When Elizabeth had a visit from young Mary, the baby, who would become John the Baptist, leaped in her womb Somehow, even before birth, he knew that the world was about to change. When the shepherds left their flock of sheep on the hillside and went to the manger, they believed that they had just come to the other side of the hill and now the world would be a better place For you For me Just wait And see.

John stood in the water of the Jordan River baptizing all who would come in repentance. And when Jesus came, he knew that this was the one. He told everyone that his whole life was dedicated to this one thing - to tell everyone that Jesus was the Messiah. Everything was going to be better now. But Elizabeth settled in to her daily work while raising their little boy, shepherds went back to their pastures to take care of unruly sheep. And John was arrested and sat in the darkness in prison.

Where was that fulfillment of all of their hopes and dreams? Wasn't everything supposed to be different. In many ways the Gospel text for today is really depressing. The

expectations were so high But Roman rule continued, daily troubles did not go away, people suffered with all of the normal human problems. And John had to ask, "Are you the one?"

I read this week about an auction that was held in Washington, DC back in 1926. Apparently what was to be auctioned off were 150,000 models of old inventions that had been sent in to be patented. There were things like a "bed-bug buster", an "illuminated cat" that was designed to scare away mice, a device to prevent snoring that consisted of a trumpet that reached from the mouth to the ear designed to awaken the snorer and not the neighbors. And then, the best one in my personal opinion, was the adjustable pulpit that could be raised or lowered according to the height of the preacher. What the article said was 'that the auction probably got 150,000 laughs; but if we would look into this situation a little deeper, we would discover that these 150,000 old patent models also represent 150,000 broken dreams. They represented a mountain of disappointments.' And so it is in our lives. Disappointments come. Are you the one? Why aren't the problems solved? Should we look for another?

John sits in prison in our Gospel text today. He had spoken against the political power of the day. I could imagine that John might have hoped that there would not be any more problem with the Roman leadership with Jesus on the scene. But the struggles continued. Was he wrong about Jesus being the Messiah? Wasn't Jesus the one? Or perhaps the question that we should be asking - the question that John should have asked ... Are our expectations wrong?

It seems to me that there are so many times when people have expectations of God that go unmet. And then the response is to blame God or to question God ... God's love ... God's power. Where was God when one thing or another happened? Why didn't God do this when I needed it to be done? Isn't God strong enough ... or, Isn't God real? One article that I read this week asked these questions:

Did Jesus fail to come when you rubbed the lantern? Then perhaps Jesus is not a genie. Did Jesus fail to punish your enemies? Then perhaps Jesus is not a cop or a judicial system. Did Jesus fail to make everything run smoothly? Then perhaps Jesus is not a mechanic. Over and over again, our disappointments have to draw us deeper and deeper into the questions - not why didn't Jesus? But rather we need to ask, 'who is Jesus really' ... and 'what is it that Jesus really does.'

It seems as though we want so desperately to be in charge. We know what God should do. Somehow we think that God is supposed to be sitting around waiting to rescue us from difficulties that we encounter. **We ask, "If Jesus is so powerful, why didn't he save the thousands from the terrorists' attacks?" "If Jesus is so loving, why didn't he heal my father?" "If Jesus came to save, why didn't he save her from that accident?" "If Jesus is concerned about the whole world, why doesn't he stop the wars?" "If Jesus provides, why doesn't he provide abundant crops so that Africa can raise enough food to feed its people?"** We figure out what God is supposed to do and can not understand when God does not do what we want.

Are you the one or should we look for another? That is what John asked in his disappointment. But the blind see and the lame walk - the deaf hear and the dead are raised. The poor hear good news. Maybe it isn't always in the way we want it but God is at work doing all of these things. I realized that in a new way when I read an article that made some comparisons. It said, *"Socrates taught for 40 years, Plato for 50, Aristotle for 40, and Jesus for only 3. Yet the influence of Christ's 3-year ministry infinitely transcends the impact left by the combined 130 years of teaching from these men, who were among the greatest philosophers of all antiquity. Jesus painted no pictures yet some of the finest paintings of Raphael, Michelangelo, and Leonardo da Vinci received their inspiration from him. Jesus wrote no poetry but Dante, Milton, and scores of the world's greatest poets were inspired by him. Jesus composed no music still Haydn, Handel, Beethoven, Bach, and Mendelssohn reached their highest perfection of melody in the hymns, symphonies, and oratorios they composed in his praise. Every sphere of human life has been enriched by this humble Carpenter of Nazareth.* God is at work to redeem creation. Can we patiently trust Him? Do we insist on God meeting our expectations? Or do we simply trust God?

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