

Matthew 11:2-11

When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" Jesus answered them, "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. And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me."

As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? What then did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces. What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written,

'See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.'

"Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."

How's everything going this morning? Is the elf on the shelf, or wherever he is hanging out these days? Are we all getting our shopping done? Are things wrapped? Are they stuck away in the closet on the highest shelf or some secret place so they don't get discovered?

In my family growing up there were five kids, five pretty headstrong kids, boy-boy-boy-boy-girl. We had this rule around Christmas that we were forbidden to go on "The Present Hunt" throughout the house. It was an unwritten rule so we figured that it didn't carry much weight and so every year we were on the hunt.

We got to be pretty good at it. Mom's closet. Under the bed. The basement, back where all the old stuff was stored. And we always found some. I never asked her, but looking back, she probably put one or two in a spot where we would find them so we would stop looking.

So, since I have good training in finding gifts, I feel obligated to tell you that I know what you're getting. That's right. I know what you are getting.

Now, since that revelation was part of a sermon, I know what you're thinking. I'm going to say something like Joy, Peace on Earth, Good will towards everyone...those kind of things. All those good things that most people only see on the Hallmark Christmas card that are making their way to you. And of course, we are going to receive those gifts. The baby Jesus, in the

manger, star overhead, angels singing, shepherds quaking, peace, joy, good will. It's coming in just two weeks.

All of that is a big part of the festivities, but those are not the gifts for us that I found when I was on my hunt this week in the passages for this morning. Those are not the gifts that you are getting that I want to tell you about. I want to talk about gifts that are more tangible good will for all mankind; something more real world. I would like to tell you about the gifts that Jesus would fill your stocking with, and the ones that he is planning to leave under your tree.

He gave us a big hint about what he is bringing this morning on this third Sunday of Advent. It was really more than a hint. It made me think about when I went out with Matthew one year when he was pretty young and we bought a Christmas gift for mom, for Jane. I told him that he had to keep it a secret, and he nodded enthusiastically with a big smile on his face. Well, when we got home he was just bursting. He couldn't help himself. He just couldn't keep silent. Now, he knew that he couldn't just come out and tell her, so he gave her a list of possibilities, sure that she would never be able to guess. He told her, "Mom, I know what you are getting. *Giggle, giggle!* It is either an airplane,,ah...or a submarine...or ahhhhh, a birdhouse! And he looked up at me grinning, sure that he had done a great job of keeping the secret. I mean, he had no doubt that his mom was going to spend the next few weeks wondering how we were going to fit a submarine under the tree.

Well, Jesus took a different approach because he wasn't even trying to keep the secret. He came right out and told us what we are getting through Christmas in today's Gospel passage. He said, "Go and tell John: 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. And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me."

So, here is what Jesus is bringing you all through the miracle of Christmas. For those who are not able to see the world properly, and clearly, and lovingly, and hopefully, he is bringing you new sight. He is going to give you the gift of seeing your neighbors, and your coworkers and schoolmates, and your family members as God sees them, through his eyes. You are going to experience how God loves them, how God loves them even when they are not perfect, or tolerable, or agreeable, or when they vote for the other candidate. And in seeing how God loves them in their imperfections and their hard-headedness, you are going to receive the gift of the clarity of the understanding of just how God sees and loves you in that same way. It is quite a powerful gift!

And Jesus is also going to bring you all the gift of transformation out of your afflictions, up from your lameness. He wants us to walk again. When you open this gift, you will know what strength really is. You will be able to stand up and fight against injustice, and selfishness, and evil, and lies, and cruelty, and all the things that we see so much of. And, although you may think that he is just going on a hunt for those other people who are so obviously ill and handicapped and hobbling through the world and heal them wherever he finds them, but in

reality, he is seeking all of us. He is seeking to heal us too, so that we might have the strength to go and bring healing on his behalf, and so that we might spread that love and wholeness at his side.

And Jesus is also bringing hearing to the deaf. He is bringing us the gift of being able to hear God's word with God as the teacher. He is giving us the ability, through our new ears, to hear God's encouragement when we are discouraged or depressed. He is bringing new ears that will be tuned to hear love instead of hate, peace instead of division, joy instead of fun. His gift of hearing the good news will flood into our poverty of spirit with his guidance so that our mouths will then be trained in a new language, and that new language will give us the ability to bring the blessing of that same message of great news to the poor in spirit of the world.

So, those are the gifts that I found that will be awaiting all of us this Christmas.

Eyes that look beyond our world. New eyes to replace the ones that have been damaged from all those things that we have had to see. Things that have not just damaged our eyes, but tainted our hearts. He is bringing new vision that will heal not just our eyes, but our hearts also.

He is bringing ears that function at a new level and in a new way that will open for us the message of God. Ears that will enable us to hear the call to embrace the world in a new way that he is whispering to each of us quietly beneath the ruckus of the holidays. Ears through which to hear the music of creation that will, in turn, re-tune our lives to be musicians for the world.

And for all of that, he will bring the strength to walk strong, with Christ, for the sake of all people.

I really didn't have to look very hard for the gifts that Jesus brings. He listed them publically for John the Baptist. He didn't try to hide them in the upstairs closet or the basement storage. He just said here they are...or really what he said was, "Here I am". I am your gift for Christmas. I am the gift that will be under the tree, and here at church, and everywhere we look. And we don't have to look hard. The gift that is coming for us is everywhere. It's right out in the open. All we have to do, once we recognize it, is to make the choice to open it, and then let the oooos and ahhhhs of Christmas morning begin.

Amen