

Third Sunday of Advent

PLACES EVERYONE! CUE THE MESSIAH

Matthew 11:2-11

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Analysis by Mark Marius

2When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples 3and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" 4Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: 5the 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. 6And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me."

7As 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? 8What then did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces. 9What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. 10This is the one about whom it is written,

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

11Truly 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.

DIAGNOSIS: Sticking to the Script

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Take 2! Cries the Divo (male diva)*

People! People! Can we get this right? Anybody? Did you not hear me in last week's lectionary episode? I was absolutely brilliant! And I repeat-"I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire" (Matt. 3:11-12).

Can I please get a winnowing fork in Jesus' hand. Fire! Where is the blasted fire! Where is the power? I could use some of that, here in JAIL! Use some of that power to bust me out for goodness sake. Am I not some of that wheat to be gathered in the granary? And yet here I sit to rot in prison for preaching YOUR MESSAGE! This just isn't working for me. Frankly, it's not working for a lot of people-not then and not now.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Casting Call*

Let's try someone else. We may have miscast this part. Surely there is someone else who will come along and can play the part of Messiah the way we see it. I highly doubt, Jesus, that you have what it takes to embody this role. We are looking for something else rather than just some do-gooder. No offense Jesus (which, in all reality means that we have been offended) but people need to be punished, judged and left behind. Next!

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Cut!*

Unfortunately for us diva or divos, like John the Baptist, we aren't calling the shots. God is the director and author of this script and the only one allowed to shout "Cut!" And when God does yell Cut! it's our heads that will roll. John said so

himself. We who doubt whether Jesus is up to the task and don't trust him as a messiah, or we who don't trust his second coming, will be the chaff that is cut and thrown into the unquenchable fire. If we don't trust God's judgment then we are no longer suited to play a part in God's kingdom. And people without parts are cut out, forever falling to the cutting room floor.

PROGNOSIS: Flipping the Script

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : Action!

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" (Matt 11:5) Jesus sticks to God's script without added interpretation. He echoes the ancient prophet Isaiah (in chapter 35:5,6) . He trusts the Author and obediently follows direction. Even when that direction leads him to the cross, where he ultimately bears the director's final cut for us. But that was not the Director's final word. Yes God, the Author/Director who yelled cut, also brings Jesus back from the depths of the cutting room floor with a word of Action. That action has given us new life and a new script. Instead of chaff, Jesus ensures that we have been secured in the granary, which means we are good fruit.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : No Small Parts

Now we are happy to play our part under the direction of the Author. No longer divas or divos, we, who in faith trust in Jesus and God's desire for his people, have an elevated status in the kingdom. We are seen as even greater than a major player like John the Baptist-the greatest of the prophets. Not because of anything we have done, because trust is all that our part calls for. And when we trust God, we trust the coming of the kingdom-whenver that may be.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : That's a Wrap!

The wrap party isn't only in the future but is also in the here

and now. Jesus, who made the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead raised, and has brought good news to the poor, still works his power through us. He keeps coming to us through the Word and Sacraments, which wrap us up in God's mercy and grace. And we, in turn, keep trusting that God's grace and mercy is precisely what this world needs. So we act it out, every chance we get, in those places in our world where it has been edited out. And keep doing so until we hear our final call: "That's a wrap!"