

The R's of Advent  
Relationship  
Mathew 11: 2-11

Our scripture text this morning holds one of the most important questions we will ever need to consider. It is found in verse 3- **“Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?”** It is a timeless question that each one of us should prayerfully answer as we prepare for the coming of Christ in this Advent season. Once we recognize and claim Jesus to be who the Scriptures proclaim Him to be, the Messiah, Emmanuel, God revealed to us, our words, our thoughts and our actions will begin to reflect those of Jesus. Our relationship with Him makes us a different person, a new creation in Christ. It is our faith in Jesus, or to say it another way our relationship with Him, that secures our place in eternity. Nothing in life is more important or more valuable. Even so, there may be times when we may question or have doubts about our faith. Perhaps we might even begin to seek a different Jesus, one of our own making.

Doubt is one of the best weapons that Satan has in his evil bag of tricks. He uses it for one purpose- to try and separate us from our relationship with Jesus Christ. He will plant those small seeds of doubt, especially when we might be experiencing difficult times, hoping that they will take root and mature into unbelief. Our faith is a shield against those attacks-Eph 6:16. **Faith is the devil's enemy.** Our faith is a gift from God-Romans 12:3. Faith is the substance of things hoped for-the evidence of things not seen- Hebrews 11:1. Faith is accompanied by repentance- Mark 1:15. Faith produces hope-Romans 5:2.

If you have ever experienced doubts about your faith in Christ, you are not alone. The Scriptures reveal many examples of people who struggled with their faith. Jesus disciple Thomas is probably the most famous. Even though he lived more than 2000 years ago, His name is still associated with a person who is skeptical about something. We call them a doubting Thomas”. However, his doubt is better described as unbelief, which we will look at in a few minutes. The apostle Peter might be a better example as a doubter, as the bold confidence he had in Christ allowed him to walk on water, until he took his eyes from the Master and allowed his fear to take over.

Our Scripture reading this morning reveals that John the Baptist may have also had doubts Jesus was who He claimed to be. He sent 2 of his followers to ask Jesus that pointed question in 11:2. *“Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?”*

The same John the Baptist that boldly preached the coming of Christ in the desert now found himself in prison, struggling with doubt and wondering if he had somehow misread the signs that were given. Perhaps some of us can relate to him, struggling with illness, heartache or disappointment. The causes of doubt are many, and fear, disappointment, and discouragement are some of the most common. Doubt can also be the result of a lack of knowledge. For example, someone who has little experience with computers and technology might doubt that they could send a 50 page letter clear across the world and have it personally received by their intended recipient in less than 2 seconds- without leaving your home or spending 55 cents on a stamp. But once they see it done, their doubts soon turn to amazement.

Doubt may be caused by failure, or even fear of failure. When I was trying to learn to water-ski, I had doubts that I would ever learn. (My instructor probably had bigger doubts). All I could do was drink half of the lake and threaten to quit in frustration. But when I finally got up on skis the first time and went for 50 yards without falling, my doubt was replaced with confidence. I knew that if I could go for 50 yards, 100 yards was now possible.

We should recognize the distinction between doubt and unbelief. Henry Drummond, a preacher from the late 1800's, explained the differences between the two like this. He said doubt is honest, while unbelief is obstinate. In other words, being stubborn or closed minded. He said doubt is looking for light, while unbelief is being content with darkness. His description is still fitting today.

Doubt is part of our search for the truth, while unbelief says that there is no absolute truth- truth is only a concept in our mind. Why look for something that does not exist? The Bible says that only a fool will refuse to acknowledge God. Life is too short to dwell on foolishness. Instead, we can focus on recognizing the things that cause us to doubt and then overcome them through our faith in Jesus.

The problem for many of us is the same one that John the Baptist appears to have been struggling with. The Christ that came was not the Christ he envisioned would come. Like John, some of us expect a conquering warrior to come to bring judgment and punishment, rather than a teacher and miracle worker. Others expect to meet a teacher and healer, but instead find themselves face to face with a Jesus that demands repentance and righteousness. Either way, doubt or unbelief should bring us to our knees and plead with God for guidance and truth.

Unlike John the Baptist, who only understood part of the mission of Christ, those of us who live today are fortunate to have the rest of the story, as Paul Harvey would say. John knew nothing of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. We know of the meaning and importance of both. We have the OT prophecies and the knowledge of how they are fulfilled in the NT. We have reliable eyewitness accounts of Christ's birth, his many miracles, and the revealed plan of salvation accomplished by his death and resurrection. We also have modern day witnesses, names like Tyndale, Luther, Wesley, Moody, Spurgeon and CS Lewis come to mind. How about Joni Ericson Tada, Elizabeth Elliott, Harriet Becher Stowe and Mother Theresa?

We could all list people whose lives were changed forever by their relationship with Christ, including some here in this church. My prayer this morning is for those whose relationship with Him is distant, those whose doubts still overshadow their faith. **The causes of doubt are many, but the result is usually the same- a missed blessing.** Don't miss the blessings Jesus has in store for you. Consider the evidence, consider the possibility, and ask Him to become part of your life. Jesus loves you and wants you to be in love with Him. It is a relationship like none other.

As we come closer to celebrating the birth and anticipate the second coming of Christ, I pray that all will come to know the truth. Let us thank God for our faith in the one He sent! Amen.