

SERMON

Matthew 11:2-11

Are you the One?

Nunawading and Waverley, 11-12-22

Dear friends in Christ,

I had a great day last Sunday. I went home on a high because of the full church and the beautiful service. People had put together interesting slide shows and a delicious lunch, and sprinkled through the day, expressions of kindness and appreciation were offered.

Is every day a great day? Far from it. Most are un-eventful days. Many are gruelling, with relentless work and responsibilities outside the home and inside it. Perhaps for some, tedious days or long days of pain or loneliness. Then there are days of crisis and disaster.

We do not have spiritual mountain-top experiences each week to lift us up but mostly days that can gradually erode our faith, little by little, unless replenished by the Spirit through his word. John the Baptist had reached the time when his days in prison created doubt in Christ: Are you the Coming One or are we to wait for another one? Just waiting for Christ's visible appearance, the seeming delay of his coming can create doubt in the minds of some Christians. John had preached the law, an uncompromising message of repentance, and he fiercely denounced the behaviour of arrogant and hypocritical believers. However, Jesus had not instigated a fiery baptism of judgement and the Spirit had not come down on people to change their ways, as John expected. Jesus was peaceful, though he could be stern; but by and large, he was lowly, eschewed power and never sought political victories and operated with compassion and mercy.

I think this can speak to us today. We need to continually check our assumptions. Should everything go our way? I know how easy it is to think that having a caring heavenly Father should reduce the number of difficulties I have. And if not, then that must reflect on the care he has for me.

Didn't our Lord Jesus say that to trust him also involves following him, denying ourselves and taking up our cross? In fact, when we become Christians, the Holy Spirit will add some complexity to our lives such as resisting temptation, trying to be kinder and more forgiving, acknowledging that we belong to the living Lord Jesus and putting up with

persecutions. So, then, if we can accept that this is the path our Lord has chosen for us, then we might cope better with difficulty, or even imprisonment as John experienced.

Jesus had not vanquished the wicked, establish peace between the nations and restored justice. It seemed to John that Jesus was not doing anything about the terrible state the world was in. Jesus responded by saying: tell John what you hear and see: the blind can see again, the lame walk, lepers are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised and the poor have the gospel preached to them. For those people, forgotten by others and despised by them, Jesus had made a world of difference to their existence. Yes, Herod Antipas was still the Tetrarch, emperor Tiberius was dominating the world and the High Priest Caiaphas was subverting the faith of many by his corrupt practices. However, in the backstreets and the remote places in the countryside, a spiritual revolution was taking place. Jesus was fulfilling the ancient prophecies but with an emphasis on the gospel, liberating the poor, the least, the dying and the sick. His was a redemption motivated by love and compassion and not the imposition of law and the forcing of obedience.

Emotional distress, like the sort that John had experienced, puts us into a situation where we are insecure and doubtful. Bleak thoughts crush any sense of hope. In a way, Jesus acted like a nurse with a worried patient. He reassured John that his gentle way was the true way of God, therefore he said, blessed is the person who takes no offense at me. If we are not put off by God's human face, his poor clothes, that he was attacked, plotted against by evil people, if we are not offended by his death on a cross, then we will see something truly wondrous: we will see him working today amongst the cursed and unclean, sitting beside the dying, restoring hope and promising a future full of restoration, sight, hearing, laughter, love and peace.

John could finally understand that the Lord Jesus was building a new world based on himself but was doing this person by person. Today, he acts amongst us in the same way, through the Spirit. The end of his work has not yet arrived but we are part of this kingdom and we can now work alongside him to bring good news to people who are poor or marginalised, or in need of any kind. Let us believe in him even when we cannot see the end of things trusting in what he can accomplish through his love for people.