

December 23, 2013

Scripture Lessons

Micah 5:2-5a

Luke 7: 18-28

Sermon            *Are you the one?*

As he walked away from the church, a middle aged man shook his head as if he was trying to clear something from it. The funeral service for his business colleague really unsettled him. Not only was he not familiar with visiting a church regularly, but he was also a man that did not like to face death and death's questions. It was far too depressing and besides all that, there was that service and that atmosphere and that coffin. The family was honestly hurting, was honestly grieving and yet there was some serenity there. Sometimes there was even a feeling of celebration, mixed with the sorrow. Where in the world did that come from? He could not fathom any of it, and what about the peace that passes all understanding?

The funeral had truly unsettled him, and at the same time it kind of intrigued him as well. He found himself questioning, is there something to this Jesus or not? Is there something to this God?

You know all of us question the existence of God at some point in our lives. Some wonder about God's reality at all, is God for real, and can God offer anything that God claims to offer? Other people that seem to believe in God, question God's intentions. Why do bad things happen to good people? as the classic book asks. What is God's will for any one of our lives? For various reasons in our lives, we do question and in today's Gospel lesson, John the Baptist asked Jesus questions, face to face directly. Are you he who is to come, or should we look for another? To a certain extent this inquiry into Jesus identity kind of surprising since John the Baptist should already know who this is after all he and Jesus are cousins, and according to Matthew chapter 3, John was the very one who baptized Jesus and John was present when the heavens opened the spirit of God, descended like a dove and a voice from heaven said those words "this is my son with whom I am well pleased". So why in the world is John questioning Jesus identity now at such a key point in his ministry? Is the question rhetorical?, so as to tell others about Jesus, or does it reflect a kind of sincere doubt in John's faith?

We have to remember that John was in prison at the time, he had understood his purpose as preparing people for the coming of the Messiah, he had been telling

them to repent, and get baptized, and then he landed in jail when he told even Herod to clean up his act in the process. And yet John was still in prison, and he still had work to do, and in his mind and his situation surely did not correspond to the way activities were unfolding. Maybe John wondered why Jesus was not doing anything to change his particular predicament as we sometimes do. John the Baptist also believed that the Messiah would also bring the Acts of Judgment, we heard those words from the gospel. The Messiah would cut down the trees that did not bear fruit, and they would throw them into the fire; He would separate the wheat from the chaff. John expected the Messiah's message to be one of immediate doom for the world. He expected him to blast his enemies and pronounce Divine destruction upon the unrepentant, but somehow this was not happening exactly as John had planned and John had hoped. Jesus seemed to have a kind of different agenda than John did. So what does John do? He starts to question, he starts to question Jesus, to wonder about the Messiah and even he begins to doubt. Whatever John's reasons, whether out of frustration for still being in jail, or disappointment because Jesus was not living up to his ideas and expectations, John the Baptist questions the very identity of Jesus. Instead of stifling his feeling he voices those feelings, instead of suppressing his expectations and doubts, he in fact lifts them up and does so face to face. I think we can learn from this, we too need to remember to take our questions and our concerns about Jesus reality and intentions straight to God. Some of us might boldly shake our fists and raise our voices; others of us may quietly contemplate maybe in anger, the murmuring our hearts and minds. But in whatever way we can be encouraged to take our questions to God and why?, because God will listen, and I believe God will answer. I think this is the attitude that we must first approach Jesus. We must first be prepared to meet Jesus with an open mind. No one can be repelled who has first been attracted to something. I think it is normal and natural for the loyal individual to question or doubt the wisdom of the leader and to withdraw or qualify his or her own allegiance to that leader. Those I think are the growing pains of faith. Loyalty puts a strain on us mentally as well as a strain on our moral courage, and yet God never resents any such passing mood or uncertainty. The open mindedness that God expects is a warning to all those of blind faith who narrow their ranks by holding blindly to inherited traditions and pre-conceived notions. Sometimes we just have to figure these things out for ourselves. Secondly loyalty to Jesus is larger than our loyalty to ideas about Jesus. We are called upon to trust Jesus, though at times we do not fully understand who Jesus is, the revelations of Jesus' spirit which are hailed as proof, of his Divine power at the same time a challenge to our loyalty and attesting to our receptiveness to his call. Are we prepared to follow the lead of Jesus at the cost of our own pet prejudices? Are we ready to change from

what we are or what we have been and strive to become what we really could be into what God wants us to be? Our faith in Jesus is often served best by the puzzled head with a steadfast heart, by a faith by which is indeed shaking but by far being completely upset. And these things strengthen us as we face each ordeal. And finally third, we need to be brave and broad enough to welcome the signs of Jesus leadership into our lives, no matter how these may run counter to popular expectations and tastes and wants. We are in the final analysis to be measured by God's standards and not those of the world around us. Some people want the church of the gospel to champion their own urgent political or social agenda, others are opposed to any involvement for any higher or lower motivations. One thing we know if we are true to God, and that is this, just because we may question the will of God for our lives, does not mean we cannot respond to God's call to love others around us. And thus it is that we strive to respond to his call to feed the hungry, and to give drink to the thirsty, and welcome the stranger, and clothe the naked, and visit the sick and imprisoned and in so doing share the gospel of God's love for all people. For this Jesus came and for this we are empowered to act because of his Advent in the midst of our lives. And so then remember then especially as we approach Christmas this coming week, that while questions of God are as natural as breathing and only God can give us the faith in the midst of lives difficulties, none of this prevents us from showing the love of Jesus in the things that we say and the things that we do each day of our lives in faith. Are you the one?, asked John the Baptist, may this same love of Jesus help each one of us find faith, help each one of us find hope as we journey to the manger during the Christmas season. Together we say, Amen.