

Good News for Fools!      Isa. 35:1-10; Luke 1:46-55; Matt. 11:2-11  
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Chapel Lane Presbyterian Church  
Third Sunday of Advent, December 16, 2007

Today is traditionally called "Gaudete Sunday", Joy Sunday. On this third Sunday of Advent we have a joyful sense that what we have long awaited is finally going to arrive.

Mary sings her Magnificat in response to what God has promised to do in her and through her for all humanity. This is cause for rejoicing! A savior is going to be born and nothing will ever be the same again. This is not a private occasion of celebration. It is a public event that is good news for everyone.

It is even good news for fools.

Looking at the text that was read from the book of Isaiah I have to admit I had to smile when the king's highway, the Holy Way is described: "no traveler, not even fools, shall go astray." Those lacking in any sense of direction will not get lost.

Of course there is getting lost and getting lost. There is the very real and material way in which we make wrong turns and end up in some dead end, unsure of the way back out.

There are other ways we get lost. When we forget there are people around us who love us and care about us. When we refuse to listen to their wise counsel. We can get lost.

Look at this character John. He is a pivotal person in the gospel story. He is the one who points the way to the Messiah. He is the one who preaches his coming and then baptizes his reality in

our midst. John is also the one who preaches to the principalities and powers of his age and gets thrown into prison for his troubles.

Now as he languishes in Herod's prison he sends his disciples to Jesus to see what is going on. He's heard reports about Jesus' ministry and judging by his question, he has his doubts. "Are you really the Messiah or is there someone else we should be on the lookout for?"

How does this question square with John's other testimonies that Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world? What about the dove that John saw descend and rest on Jesus?

Or did John expect a Messiah who would intervene and get him out of prison or, better yet, not allow him to go to prison in the first place?

Was John a fool to put his trust in Jesus and to expect so much from him? And so we get this glimpse of a John who is not so sure of things. He's not preaching to the scribes and Pharisees anymore about bearing fruits worthy of repentance.

Now he is forced to use his disciples to do his bidding and to garner news of the outside world.

Where is the joy for John? Where is the joy for any of us who are looking at the all too real realities of our lives and of the world and try to find a word of good news in the midst of all the bad news?

Is it foolish to have hope? Are we fools to believe in a God of love and justice, a God who is not slow about his promises? I

recall a time in my teens when I thought having a hang glider would be about the best thing I could imagine. Soaring over the land, following the birds in flight.

And then I started to read about hang gliding accidents and about those down drafts that can send you plummeting through the air. Sometimes the down drafts could be about 50 feet. This wouldn't be a problem for someone 100 feet in the air, but what if one was 30 feet up and then got caught in a 50 foot descent?

Is there enough good news in Christ to keep us airborne and to carry us even when it seems as though the ground is coming up to meet us at an alarming pace?

John's life was in the confines of the walls of Herod's prison. How was he to continue to have hope, much less to have joy? If John was a fool to believe in Jesus as Messiah, where does that leave us?

Well, perhaps the good news, at least some of it, is in how Jesus talks about John. Jesus never doubted who John was. He was a prophet, the last prophet in the line of all those who foretold the coming of Messiah. John stands with Isaiah and all the others who knew that God's day would come.

Now Jesus is talking to the crowd about John. He has no doubt about who John was. His confidence in John has not wavered. Still, John is not and has never been the focal point. He has always been one pointing the way to Messiah.

Jesus the Christ, God's promised Messiah. He is the centerpiece and the focus. Compared to him, all of us are least in the kingdom of God, but because of him, all of us - wise and fools alike - know

that the road of our salvation is straight and sure and we need not be afraid or wracked by doubt or consumed by fear.

If God has made a way for even fools to find the path, then maybe, just maybe, there is hope for me too. And if there's hope for the likes of me, then I am sure that there is hope for the likes of you, too.

On this Joy Sunday we can rejoice in God's promises, rejoice that God finds us and brings us home and that the sorrows and sighing we experience will, one day, be a thing of the past. And until that day, how can we sing out about our redemption and the one who makes all things possible?

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