

This morning we return to hearing words from John the Baptist as recorded by the gospel of Matthew. If you were here last week we read from the third chapter of Matthew where John the Baptist was baptizing people in the River Jordan. People were coming to be baptized by him but he was announcing that someone greater than he was coming. John was announcing that someone was coming whose baptism would be by the Holy Spirit.

Jesus then appears and asks to be baptized by John in the river. But then after this encounter life becomes very difficult for John the Baptist. You see, John the Baptist gets politically involved. John became a strong voice against King Herod and the king's actions. But kings don't tend to like political dissent.

Kings don't like it when ordinary people, especially religious folks, call them to task. So King Herod has John the Baptist put in prison and the king will eventually carry out the death penalty against John the Baptist by beheading. By killing John the Baptist, Herod thinks he has won.

In our Scripture today we find a very different John the Baptist than the one that foretold the coming of Christ and offered him baptism in the Jordan River. In our Scripture which we are about to read it appears that John is beginning to have some doubts about God delivering a Savior.

John is in prison for his political opinions and now he is wondering if what he is hearing about is a sign that God indeed is bringing a messiah. John is hoping but he isn't sure.

Read Matthew 11:2-11

My friend Jan Edmiston who is one of the two co-moderators of the Presbyterian Church USA writes a blog. This week she writes about getting a new cell phone with a new phone number about 6 months ago. She says this about her new phone which some of us can relate to.

“About six months ago, I got a new phone. Clearly the number used to belong to Rhonda because I immediately started receiving calls for her. I don’t answer the phone when the number isn’t immediately recognized and so – when I didn’t pick up – quite a few voice mail messages were left for me.

In spite of my “This is Jan Edmiston, please leave a message” intro, my messages sounded like these:

Rhonda! Girl, where the (blank) are you? Don’t think you can get away with this.

Hello. This call is for Rhonda. Please contact us immediately regarding your back payments.

This call is for Rhonda. This is the third warning regarding your credit card payment. Please make full payment or call us for further arrangements.

You can’t hide from me, girl. I am going to find you and when I do I’m going to (blank) you and your dog.”

Jan concludes her blog post by saying that “clearly Rhonda is in trouble. I got another call for her just yesterday. State Farm Insurance said they’ve been looking for her for several months and – in the meantime – they promise to remove my number from her contact information.”

In her blog post Jan then reflects on Rhonda. She says, “Somewhere in this country, there is a woman named Rhonda who is hiding or trying to escape or feeling overwhelmed with debts or all of the above. She is not the only one. There are thousands of Rhondas out there.

But this Rhonda is my special concern. We share a phone number. I pray she is not alone in her burdens. I hope she is safe. I ask that – if you are in a position to help a person in trouble this season – you will help. The person you assist might be my Rhonda. Thank you.

Jan Edmiston concludes, “I’m keeping my eyes open for a Rhonda this season too.”

This week I was listening to Christmas music on the radio and the station played part of an interview with Christian author Max Lucado. The interviewer asked Lucado how Christians should be preparing for Christmas this year. Lucado suggested that Christians should try to put themselves in the shoes of the other. He said that whomever you consider to be your other to try to understand what their life is like.

Lucado mentioned trying to understand what it was like to be an immigrant. Lucado said that wealthy people should try to understand what it was like to be poor. People living in the inner city should try to understand what it was like to live in rural areas and in other parts of the country. People outside of prison should try to understand what it is like to be in prison.

Lucado said in this interview that if you sought to open yourselves up to the perspectives of others that it would lead to a deeper understanding of what it means that Jesus Christ entered into the world to offer salvation to everyone.

We certainly see that in this Scripture that we read today. John sends a message to Jesus and asks him if he is indeed the one that John has been telling people about. And how does Jesus respond? Does he respond with some type of theological definition similar to the Nicene Creed where Jesus says that I am one with God? No. Jesus responds to John's question by stating what he has been doing.

Jesus says to tell John that, "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. And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me."

In referring back to the story that Jan Edmiston shared, I wonder if it is people like Rhonda that Jesus is referring to. I wonder if it is when we reach out and show love and compassion to folks like Rhonda and to people that Jesus mentioned that tend to be cast aside that we are indeed welcoming the Savior into our hearts.

Who is the Rhonda in our midst that we are called to share the good news of God's love to this Christmas?

I wonder if maybe the Grinch from Dr. Seuss had it correct when he concluded.

"And the Grinch, with his Grinch-feet ice cold in the snow, stood puzzling and puzzling, how could it be so? It came without ribbons. It came without tags. It came without packages, boxes or bags. And he puzzled and puzzled 'till his puzzler was sore. Then the Grinch thought of something he hadn't before. What if Christmas, he thought, doesn't come from a store. What if Christmas, perhaps, means a little bit more."

Maybe we leave this place this morning looking for Rhonda who needs to hear and experience from you and me a sense that a Savior is coming for her. AMEN.

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-Edmiston, Jan, <https://achurchforstarvingartists.wordpress.com/>

-Dr. Seuss, "How the Grinch Stole Christmas"

-Given: December 11, 2016 in Allison Creek Presbyterian (York, SC)