

Is there a gap in our expectations of who Jesus is and what he does? Jesus said, "I have come to bring the kingdom here." That means that God's kingdom is already here. It is not yet fully recognizable, but none-the-less, it is already here among us. However, often we only see the bad, the violent, the oppressive. We have a tendency to not see Jesus is the midst and at work.

John the Baptist grew up in a Jewish household. His father was a Levite and had special privileges to enter the Holiest of Holies in the temple. John was a Jew. He, like other Jews, was expecting the Messiah to be a militant King who would come and overthrow the Roman Empire with force and lead God's people into a secure and comfortable life.

John was full of hope that Jesus was the one, and John was on the bandwagon to help in any way he could. He spoke out courageously against the grievances and sins the people were committing and inviting them to repent – turn around and live a kingdom life. He was so bold that he even told King Herod that he had committed grievous sins by doing away with his wife so that he could take his brother's wife for himself. His outspokenness landed him in prison.

Now, from this point of view, looking out of the bars that held him hostage, he has to wonder if this Jesus was really the man who John thought he was. If so, why wasn't Jesus coming to break him out of prison? Why was he rotting in prison instead of on a battlefield conquering the Roman army? So, he sends his disciples to ask Jesus, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?"

John is perhaps experiencing a gap between his expectations of who Jesus is and what he does, and who he really is and what he really is here to do.

Perhaps, you feel this gap too - a gap between our image of the one who is to come and the one who shows up; a gap between what we want and what we get.

There are many folks who believe that if they do everything right according to the 10 Commandments, go to church, say their prayers, do good deeds, that

life should be easy and comfortable with no snags. But that is not what Jesus promised. So, when we experience a heart break, when evil wins the day, when we feel our prayer goes unanswered, when life has a set-back, when a loved one dies, we feel a gap between what we expected from Jesus and what we got. This gap is often filled with disappointment, fear, grief, confusion, anger, and even doubt about God's very existence or love for us. This gap, however, holds us like a prison cell.

All through Advent, the message to us has been to prepare, be watchful, stay awake, get ready, the kingdom is here and Jesus is coming back to fulfill it.

So, what are you looking for? That is John's question. Am I looking for another? It's not just John's questions; it's ours too.

Think about the many ways that question comes up for us:

- Is he/she the love of my life or should I look for another?
- Is this my career or should I be doing something else?
- How do I know God's will for my life?; is it this or that?
- Did I make the right decision, or should I have made another?

These questions are good questions as long as we continue to search for, recognize, and identify God with us. They reveal our desire to align our lives with the kingdom. They are good questions.

There was nothing wrong about John's questioning whether or not Jesus was the Messiah because he followed it up as God wanted him to. He asked the right question of the right person. He asked, "Are you the one?", and he asked Jesus himself.

When we find ourselves questioning the truth about God and about Jesus, we should immediately go to prayer. "Knock and the door will be opened," says Jesus. "Ask in my name, and it shall be given," said Jesus. Jesus will grant us answers to our questioning.

However, Jesus doesn't always answer the way we want him to. Jesus didn't say to John, "Yes, I'm your guy!" John will have to decide for himself based upon what he hears and sees. Jesus rarely provides a direct answer. More often than not Jesus answers a question with a question. What do you see and hear? Look around. Pay attention. Watch and listen.

Instead of giving John a 'yes' or 'no' answer, Jesus describes what to look for, how to recognize the kingdom, how to identify the coming of the one who is more powerful.

The kingdom, the One who is more powerful, the Messiah, comes to us in a way that is unique and particular to our lives and needs.

For the blind, he comes as sight. For the deaf, he comes as hearing, for the dead as rising, and for the poor as good news.

These are not just meant to be taken literally.

1. We may not be literally blind, but we might be blind when it comes to seeing the kingdom. Have you ever had a new insight into your life and wondered why you hadn't thought of that before? Have you ever discovered beauty in a place or person you thought could never live up to that? Have you ever seen new opportunities and possibilities for your life? Is that not Jesus giving sight to the blind?
2. We may not be literally deaf, but we might be deaf to the truth, the way, and the life of Jesus. Have you ever heard a new truth about your life – the soft voice of love, or the silence that speaks of intimacy and presence? Have you ever heard a cry for justice or help and responded with prayer, action, or compassion?
3. We may not be physically unable to walk, but have you ever been crippled by grief and loss, depression, or addiction to the point you can't move? Then one day something happens, and you take the first step, and then another, and another?

4. Remember a time when you just couldn't feel comfortable in your own skin because of guilt or shame? Remember people talking about you or making fun of you? Then one day you experienced forgiveness.
5. How about those times in your life when it seemed that part of you had died? Maybe it was a broken friendship, when you retired, or needed a pacemaker. Something felt missing, then one day you sensed a new vitality.
6. What about those times when you felt poor in spirit and heard a word of encouragement, or affirmation, or hope, or love?

All of us, at times, are blind, deaf, lame, diseased, dead, and poor. And at those times, Jesus comes when least expected and with a surprise of new possibilities, a way to move, forgiveness, compassion, vitality, or a word of hope. These are the 'already' signs of God's kingdom in the world. These are the signs that Jesus was, is, and always will be our Messiah, God with us.

What do you see and hear? Can you look at your life and recognize the One who came, the same One who is to come again?

If you recognize God with you, then we are called to share that good news by inviting others to come, see, and hear, especially now in Advent when we are purposefully looking, watching, and waiting. He is coming! The Kingdom is here!