

St. Andrew's Episcopal Church
The Third Sunday of Advent
December 11, 2016
Matthew 11:2-11
The Rev. Grayce O'Neill Rowe

Today is the Sunday of joy. We light the pink candle to represent joy. Liturgically right or wrong, some also refer to this as Mary Sunday but that is really next week. Liturgically right or wrong, some in this part of the world also refer to this as Our Lady of Guadalupe Sunday. Whatever you prefer to believe, today is the day we light the pink candle for joy, we light it for rejoicing. And so, today's Gospel is kind of interesting, no mention of rejoicing, no mention of Mary, nothing about Mother Mary except for John the Baptist asking from his jail cell, Are you the one who is to come?

And with my strange mind, that makes me remember the wonderful, little children's book, Are You My Mother? It was one of my favorites and I believe that it was a favorite for each of my children as well.

For those who don't remember it, the story goes like this: a mother bird is sitting on her egg when all of a sudden the egg jumps and the mother realizes that she needs to go and get some food because her baby bird will soon be there. She flies away and while she is gone, the baby bird hatches out of his egg. He looks around and says, "Where is my mother?" Not seeing her, he decides to go and look for her. The problem is, he does not have any idea what she looks like. He asks a kitten, a hen, a dog and a cow if any of them are his mother. "Are you my mother?" Each says "no." Convinced that he has a mother, he continues on his search. He sees a boat and calls out to it. He sees an airplane and calls out to it. Finally, he sees a large piece of machinery and convinced that this is his mother he runs up to it. He asks, "Are you my mother?" And all that the machine says in return is, "Snort." The little baby bird becomes frightened as this snort starts to lift him up into the air, the snort lifts him higher and higher into the air. He starts crying for his mother and then the most wonderful thing happens. The snort puts the baby bird right back in his nest. Home again and so is his mother. When she comes up to him she says, "Do you know who I am?" He answers, "Yes, I know who you are. You are not a kitten. You are not a hen. You are not a dog. You are not a cow. You are not a boat, or a plane, or a snort. You are a bird, and you are my mother!" I just love that story.

And that story makes me think of today's Gospel, you know, the part when John the Baptist asks, from his prison cell, when John the Baptist asks are you my mother? Well, not really, but he asks a question somewhat like it; he asks, are you the one who is to come?

John, I would imagine, had a certain idea of what his messiah would look like, he had a certain idea of how his messiah would act. And when he heard of what Jesus was doing, it may be that this did not fit with his preconceived idea of what a messiah would do. If we remember what we heard in last Sunday's Gospel, John said that there is one coming after him who would be more powerful than him, this one who is coming would baptize with fire and the Holy Spirit, and his winnowing fork would be in his hand, he would clear his threshing floor and would gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire. John seemed to have a vision of a strong and powerful messiah. And with all of John's fierce talk about repentance, I wonder what he thought about a messiah who hung around with tax collectors and women of ill repute.

Instead of this one with a winnowing fork, instead of a fiery preacher of repentance, John hears of a messiah who is giving sight to the blind, he makes the lame walk, he cleanses lepers, the deaf hear, the dead are raised and the poor have good news brought to them. Not exactly the same kind of messiah and so John says, are you the one who is to come?

Are you my mother?

Today is the third Sunday of Advent. Just two weeks to go before Christmas and the birth, just two weeks to go before the coming of Jesus. By now we are heavy into our preparations, the secular ones for sure; after all, there are not too many shopping days, there are not too many baking days left. And as an aside here, don't be worried if you have not found all of your presents or finished all of your baking. St. Andrew's is here to help you out. Just come by our Parish Hall after this service and you just may find what you need at our Holiday Boutique. At this point in the season, people are already asking the dreaded question, are you ready? My answer is usually a chuckle and then a long sigh.

This dreadful question, however, is really a good question. Are you ready? Are we ready? Are we ready to recognize the messiah when he comes?

Have we finished our spiritual preparations, have we finished the preparations that will help us to know Jesus?

The Gospel invites us to take a look at just what kind of Christians we happen to be. Are we Christians in name only or are we ones who give, and give, praying for those in need, volunteering our time and talent? Determining what kind of lives we live as Christians is an essential part of Advent preparation, it is an essential part of life preparation.

And the only way we can begin to figure out how to live as a Christian is if we are able to recognize the one we are following. For, if Jesus comes and we have no idea of who he is, then how on earth, and in heaven, can we follow him?

So, what is it that we expect to see when Jesus comes? How will we recognize him? How well do we know him? Will he be just like we picture him or will he perhaps be something else?

Do our pictures of Jesus change when we realize that our messiah is a messiah whose force is in his gentle touch? In our culture, what happens to our picture of Jesus when we realize that our messiah is a messiah who claims that the last will be first? Have we made the Gospel so comfortable that our search for Christ is something like a baby bird asking a cow if she is his mother? Or do we expect Jesus to look so much like us, mirror images, that we completely miss him when he comes?

Are you my mother? Are you my messiah? Is he standing in the midst of us right now? Do we recognize him?

Today is a good day for us to start considering our visions of a messiah, it is a good day for us to start considering our visions of Jesus. And if we are not sure, then Jesus invites us to go to those places where the blind receive their sight, where the lame are made to walk, where the hungry are fed, where addicts are healed, where the grieving are comforted, where the cold and naked are clothed, where the homeless are sheltered.

We can hang around with those who are doing our messiah's work. We can hang around and get to know the ones they are serving. Who knows, maybe, just maybe, we'll get to see him and maybe, just maybe, we'll recognize him when he comes.

