

Third Sunday of Advent - A – 2019-2020
Isaiah 35.1-6,10///James 5.7-10///Matthew 11.2-11

→I can't remember when I first heard it this year...but Advent and Christmas would somehow not be the same if I didn't hear the popular song "Do you Hear What I Hear?"

→I'm sure you know it well...it begins:

Said the night wind to the little lamb...do you hear what I hear?

Way up in the sky, little lamb...do you hear what I hear?

→and the carol continues with all manner of questions about what possibly could be heard in this season of expectation and wonder...

→and, it ends with the affirmation about the coming of the Lord...

→with broad chords and all voices singing in parts accompanied by full organ, the carol affirms in an explosion of confidence.... "*He will bring us goodness and light!*"

→when you look more closely...that carol parallels a kind of good news/bad news scenario...for us...

→[you know]...it is always fun to deliver good news...to tell the winners of the sweepstakes, "*you won!*" or the job applicant, "*you're hired*" or the salesperson, "*you got the contract...we select you.*"

→but bad news tears at us, dragging us along without any joy or hope....we hate to hear bad news...and we hate to be the bearers of bad news as well.

→who wants to hear the meteorologist forecast seven straight days of snow and clouds...what group of investors wants to hear minimal predictions for the company...and how do you think alumni would respond to the new head coach telling them that he thinks the team will only win one or two games all season long?

→no...we want good news...we want fair skies, smooth sailing, winning seasons and solid returns...

→and woe to the prophet or priest...CEO or coach who warns us differently!

→such negative prognostication [predictions] are usually rewarded with sarcastic laughter, awkward silence or outright persecution...

→these days our ears seem to be tuned only to the positive, upbeat music of optimism...

→and this thirst for good news...slanted, or spun, toward the positive is not a new phenomenon...it has always been so...especially among those in power...or those who stand to gain the most...

→in the first century, the ones in power included King Herod...a shrewd and paranoid ruler in Judea...**and** the unholy alliance of religious and political officials of the day who teamed up to preserve their power base under Herod...

→the iron fist of Rome could be kept at bay, they reasoned...if they maintained the peace in Judea....

→so nothing ...and no one....could rock the boat...and risk awakening the sleeping giant that was Rome...

→that was until John the Baptist spoke up and shattered the silence with his fiery delivery, unorthodox appearance and searing message that was like fingernails on a chalkboard to the minds of Herod and his supporters.

→it had been a long time since people had heard preaching like John...some said it had not been since the time of the prophets, like Isaiah...

→[and] maybe that is why John has been called the last of the Old Testament prophets....or why Isaiah has been called the first of the New Testament evangelists...

→and is why Isaiah is the most-often quoted Old Testament book in the New Testament....

→these two preachers...separated by eight centuries...were united by a common sense call to proclaim the truth...even though that truth rubbed those in power the wrong way.

→and this is the message that continues to day in our scripture readings....

→last week we heard of John preaching in the desert...he warned of God's coming wrath...by preaching a baptism of repentance...urging us to prepare the way....make straight our paths.

→today...we hear of John sending messengers to Jesus asking the same question any one of us would ask... *“are you the one who is to come or are we to wait for another.”*

→and Jesus quickly offers a response quicker than hitting the “send” button in an email... *“Go and tell John what you hear and see: 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 to me.”*

→like that Christmas carol.... “what do we hear and see...”

→for too many Advent seasons...we have heard this lesson and made all kinds of explanations as to why blindness and lameness, deafness and death, and the ravages of the poor are not healed, fixed and made right...

→it is easy to wiggle around answers set up by thoughts such as “well Jesus is not among us anymore...or those were miracles that happened back then...but such things don’t happen these days.... and so on...

...but....what do we hear and see....today?

→three candles now burn ...the third...lighted today, marks the midpoint of our Advent journey....

→this candle often called the candle of joy...announces wonder and celebration....

→reminding us that no matter how dark the night may seem, or how brutal life might become, or how empty the loneliness may get....God brings and gives His light into our troubled world...

...what do we hear and see...

→I want to believe...and I hope you do as well...that the promises of the prophets...and the hope of John the Baptist is still very much alive in our world and lives today....

→that Jesus Christ is not coming to us....but that he is already here...among us....in each of us...

→and His grace and love, life and resurrection is a part of all of us...in the way we live,
and speak and act...

→that is exactly what this season of anticipation and preparation is all about

→and the beautiful decorations...the evergreen smells...and warm music...the bold
pageantry of this time of year...all come together to put you and me in a place where we can
hear and see ourselves...as God sees us...

created in his image....loved from the before the heavens existed...and wanted
now and always...as his children....

→and so, in these waning moments of Advent with but 10 days until Christmas....

“what.....do you hear and see?”