
Advent 3

Matthew 11:2–11
Salvation—Not for Sale



Open our eyes, O Gracious God, and bless our Advent journey. Enable us to look beyond the familiar and observe instead your presence before us and around us. Remove the blinders of resentment and fear, and by your Spirit help us to see Jesus in the face of both friend and stranger, for your love's sake.

Amen.

What do you see? In mysteries, whether on the pages of books or on the screen, the detective is not necessarily more suave, more sophisticated, more impressive than the other people in the room. Far from it, sometimes. But the detective—at least, the successful detective—is the one who notices what others miss, who observes what others gloss over. To those who do not truly see, a half-empty glass or a torn piece of paper is simply that, but to the observant one, it can be an important clue that unlocks the puzzle.

When John the Baptist sends messengers to inquire whether Jesus might be the Messiah, Jesus tells them to go back to John and report what they have seen: remarkable healings, changed lives, unimagined possibilities. As the messengers depart, Jesus goes on to ask those around him what they expected to see when they first encountered John in the desert. Perhaps they thought they would see someone dressed to impress, someone living the easy life. But what did they see? A true prophet, someone who challenged all their expectations.

Elsewhere in Matthew's Gospel, we find the story of Jesus looking in vain for figs on a barren fig tree, cursing it when he found none. His disciples were surprised since they themselves could see that the tree would not bear any fruit. Why was he so upset? What did he expect? That is the question, isn't it? The disciples saw what they expected to see. Jesus always sees beyond the expected. Jesus sees more.

As twenty-first century followers of Christ, it is all too easy to take up with those earliest followers and only see the expected. If so, we will miss so much. Sure, we can pray and go to church and move forward knowing that God loves us...and all this is good. All this is of God. But God wants more for us. God wants us to do more than just settle in our faith. If we just settle in our spiritual rocking chairs, we will miss

out on all the miracles, we will miss out on all the divine opportunities, we will miss out on all the unexpected possibilities that God wants us to experience. If we dare to open our hearts to God's grace, if we dare to open the eyes of our spirits, then we will discover what the beloved old hymn says, "I once was lost, but now am found, was blind, but now I see."

As Christ's followers today, as members of the Jesus Movement, we need to throw off the blinders that prevent us from experiencing the abundant life and remarkable ministry to which God calls each one of us. Let us follow not simply in the footsteps of those early disciples, but let us follow in the footsteps of Jesus himself who offered salvation freely. There are still people to be touched, lives to be changed. But will we dare to open our eyes and see what God may be trying to show us?

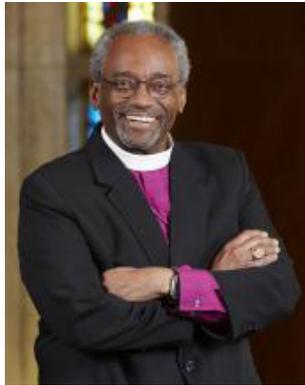
Will we dare to open our eyes and be evangelists, messengers of hope to those around us who may not even realize they desperately need that hope? When the earliest disciples were afraid to accept Saul of Tarsus into their community—because all they could see was an angry, dangerous person—it took Barnabas to look at Saul/Paul through a different lens and to see...not just what was...but what could be.

Will we dare to open our eyes and be reconcilers, building bridges where chasms of hurt and resentment exist between people? When thirteenth-century crusaders looked at those who were different from them and saw only enemies, it took Francis of Assisi to view the situation in a different way, crossing through battle lines with courage and humility, and opening up crucial lines of communication with the Sultan himself.

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Will we dare to open our eyes and be true stewards of God's creation? When countless people...both those who call themselves Christians and those who don't...continue to take this planet for granted, it takes those with eyes to see to look around, step forward, and do what is needed to preserve "this fragile earth, our island home."

As those who would indeed follow Christ, let us open our eyes to see what we have all too often missed. Let us, by the power of the Spirit, become the evangelists, reconcilers, and stewards of creation, that God calls us to be, because salvation is not for sale. ♦



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A series of Advent devotions prepared by the leaders of Anglican and Lutheran churches in full communion.