

Isaiah 35:1-10
Psalm 146:5-10
James 5:7-10
Matthew 11:2-11

Sermon December 11th, 2022

God is Present

In our gospel, we see that the authorities are done listening to John the Baptist who is now suffering in prison for his rebukes. The same John the Baptist who invests much time and energy into preparing the way for Jesus' movement to take off. The same John the Baptist, who is now doubting this very movement. Even as he hears fragments of stories of what Jesus is doing to reveal God's healing and redemption to people throughout Galilee.

Like John, we can find ourselves in a dark place where we struggle to see Jesus at work in our lives. Where we struggle to see Jesus as our Messiah, our saviour. The one who has come to heal and redeem us from our suffering. The one who has come to liberate us from those things and people who afflict us.

Sometimes we can find ourselves in a dark place where we struggle to see Jesus at work in our lives and in our world (**Image One:** someone who is suffering).

Maybe you are suffering from depression, and can't see that your family and friends are doing everything in their power to support you through this. Because the emotional pain, the feelings of worthlessness, the despair, are too much in the moment for you to bear.

Sometimes we can find ourselves in a dark place where we struggle to see Jesus at work in our lives and in our world (**Image One**).

Maybe you just found out that you have cancer, and are struggling to find hope in the newest treatment options that are promising, but not certain. Because the physical pain, the fear of dying, is consuming all your brain power.

Sometimes we can find ourselves in a dark place where we struggle to see Jesus at work in our lives and in our world (**Image One**).

Maybe you are estranged from a family member or childhood friend. There are people in your life who love you, but you have trouble fully experiencing this love. Because you still feel the pain and grief that comes from the loss of a close relationship. You find yourself overwhelmed with feelings of anger, guilt, resentment, and/or regret. Especially as the Christmas season approaches.

Sometimes we can find ourselves in a dark place where we struggle to see Jesus at work in our lives and in our world (**Image One**).

Maybe you are grieving the death of a loved one, or you have been laid off from your job, or you are suffering in prison, or you are a member of a marginalized group who feels the weight of oppression on your shoulders.

Maybe you are a faithful believer who feels weighed down when you see that your church isn't doing enough to confront pressing issues in your community. You start to doubt the vision, the mission of the church.

Sometimes we can find ourselves in a dark place where we struggle to see Jesus at work in our lives and in our world (**Image One**).

Like John, you might even hear of a story or two where Jesus is at work in someone's life, but you still doubt. Because the darkness is so overwhelming.

Well, in response to John's inquiry, Jesus reiterates his message that he indeed is at work in our lives and in our world healing and redeeming us (**Image Two**: someone who is experiencing healing). Jesus shares many stories where Jesus has made a difference in people's lives. Jesus tells John's disciples to go back to John and retell these stories. Over and over again if necessary.

Jesus goes on to tell his own disciples how much he values John. John's doubt doesn't stop Jesus from loving him. Instead, John's doubt moves Jesus to continue to share his stories of where God is at work in the world healing and redeeming God's creation (**Image Two**). Because Jesus cares for John, and doesn't want him to live in despair.

Like John, Jesus values us even when we doubt. Jesus still loves us, and is moved by our doubt to keep sharing his stories of where God is at work in our world healing and redeeming God's creation.

Jesus invites us to reconnect to those stories in our lives where we had experienced God's healing and redeeming love (**Image Two**). Those stories that give us hope when we find ourselves once again in these dark places. That even though we are suffering now, we will one day be redeemed from this suffering. Again.

For those who suffered in exile 2500 years ago, Isaiah proclaims this promise that God's people will return from exile. Isaiah, along with many other prophets, encouraged the people, to look back to Egypt where God liberated Israel from slavery, to give them hope that once again, they will experience liberation from their oppressors.

Our stories matter. They make a difference. Not only in our own lives, but also, in the lives of others.

But as James reminds us, suffering is a patient process where sometimes we need to keep sharing our stories over and over again before someone is ready to hear them. Sometimes we need to keep hearing our support people's stories over and over again

before we are ready to hear them. Sometimes we need to keep remembering our own stories over and over again before we are ready to hear them.

Jesus shares these stories of how we as God's creation have been recipients of God's healing and redeeming love over and over again (**Image Two**). Jesus shares these stories throughout the gospels. The prophets, the apostles, share these stories throughout the rest of the Bible. Whenever we doubt, we are encouraged to open up the Word of God, and listen.

Whenever we struggle to see Jesus at work in our lives. Jesus is ready to retell his story. A story where his own suffering led to God's healing and redeeming love for all the world (**Image Two**).

Let us pray, gracious God, sometimes we find ourselves in dark places in need of your healing and redemption. Give us the patience we need to endure until we experience this healing and redemption. As we wait help us lean on those stories we hear in Your Word, those stories we hear through our friends and family, those past stories of our own experience we remember. Those stories that give us hope in your promise that you are always with us. That we will be recipients of your healing and redemption for our lives and for our world. **Amen.**

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