

"A New Way"

December 14, 2025

First Christian Church

Scripture text: Matthew 11: 2-6

Last Sunday, John the Baptist was in the wilderness, doing his thing. He was telling people to get ready to meet God. He was baptizing people in the Jordan River as a sign of repentance; of the new leaf they were turning over so their meeting with God would be a good one. And the people flocked to him. Jesus even went to be baptized by John. Of course John recognized Him and instead wanted to be baptized by Jesus. John knew who Jesus was and pointed to Him as the One who would baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire, who would bring the judgment, and make things right. Jesus is who John was preparing the way for. But now, in the 11th chapter of Matthew, things have changed. John is in prison. He spoke out against Herod, the Roman appointed ruler of Galilee, because Herod married his sister-in-law, which was against Jewish law. And now he is in jail for speaking the truth. Jail is not a fun place to be, not where John wants to be, and not where John should be. Sitting in jail is John's "this is not right" moment. "Why am I suffering and will possibly be put to death because Herod did something wrong?" Jesus is supposed to be the Son of God, and the Son of God is supposed to make things right. Yet this is not right. John's powerful belief in Jesus waivers, and he sends some of his followers to Jesus and asks, "Are you the One who is to come, or are we to wait for another?"

John's waiver and John's question are classic human. Many, if not all of us, have had that moment when our life is not what it is supposed to be, and we wonder if what we believe is actually true. We come to the conclusion: in a good creation run by a good God, where I am is not where I should be. For John it was a man dedicating his life to doing what God called him to do, and it lands him in jail. For another it might be a large purchase that was not what was promised, or possibly a divorce. Whether you are the blindsided spouse, the one whose anxiety and distance has been building for years, or the child of divorce, that broken home is not the way it is supposed to be. For another, it is a single word, "cancer". In a good world run by a good God, this is not supposed to happen. When a routine medical procedure goes bad, or the business where you worked for 35 years suddenly closes and you have no place to work and your pension is gone. When the government you trusted turns on you, when you have become a casualty in someone else's war, when the nest is suddenly empty and so are you. When the present you are experiencing and the future you banked on is no longer what it is supposed to be because a person has changed or is gone, the ground you thought was solid is crumbling beneath you. You believed the promise that there is a God up in heaven who cares, but suddenly your life is the star witness that there is not. This is not right. This is not fair. This is not how it is supposed to be. And you find yourself wavering, and asking with John, "Jesus, are You the One?" "Are You the One or should we be looking for another?" It is a profoundly human question.

Jesus responds to us and John's disciples by saying, "What do you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, those with a skin disease are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them." That is a good answer, but not the answer John wanted to hear, and frankly speaking, not the message we want to hear either. We and John wanted Jesus to simply say, "On it," then wave His magic wand, and set John free, punish those who hurt us, and bring blessings to the righteous. We want the strong man John the Baptist spoke of who brings his winnowing fork, separates the good from the bad, and burns up the bad until the only thing left is good. What we want is the Abraham covenant we talked about last week but with a way more active enforcer where the good are rewarded and the evil are punished in real time. And it would work if this was a good world and we were a righteous people. But this is not a good world and we are not a righteous people. We are a mixed bag at best.

Was it Darwin who coined the phrase survival of the fittest? He didn't look at creation and coin the phrase survival of the compassionate or the loving or the righteous. It is survival of the fittest, and fittest is generally defined in battle. Whether that is battling the elements or battling each other to rule and reproduce. In the human world, we know history is written by the victors. Not by the most righteous, not by the most noble, not by the most loving, not by the most understanding, not by the one in the right; but the one with the biggest gun. Theologically, Christians know this world and the people and animals within it are not good. C.S. Lewis lost his faith as a 9-year-old when he lay in bed with his pillow over his head, trying to drown out the sound of his loving mother's screams of agony as both the cancer and the cancer treatments consumed her body. How could a good God in a good world let this happen? He found faith again as a professor in Oxford when he learned just how seriously Christianity takes evil and its hold on us. Romans says all have sinned and fallen short of God. Selfishness defines us as individuals, as corporations, as a people. Yes some of us grow beyond it and strive to be gifts to each other, gifts to creation, gifts to this world; but it is only because we are overcoming our natural programming in a not good world defined by battle, selfishness, and death.

Yet look at Jesus' answer. What He is doing is overcoming evil and overcoming our natural programming. He says to John's friends, "Look at what I am doing." Jesus is not using His big guns to take over, to compete, and make everyone else submit. That is survival of the fittest, victors writing history, a person being a normal, selfish person. No what Jesus invites us to see is one who is fighting against that. He says, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, those with a skin disease are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them." Jesus is about healing, not dominating. Freeing others as opposed to making them submit. Using the power given Him to bring hope and make people see each other as family as opposed to combatants. Jesus comes as a servant to the broken as opposed to a punisher of the proud.

So where does that leave us? Well, it leaves John in jail, soon to lose his head. It leaves the lost investment lost, the broken family broken, the cancer victim with cancer, the unemployed without a job, and what felt like a firm foundation crumbling beneath us. But it also leaves our free will intact. There is an old tongue in cheek proof for God that asks, "If God can do anything, can God create something so big that God can't move it?" And for me, the answer is "yes" – human freewill. God created us with a brain and the ability to think and feel and reason and make decisions, and it is that ability which allows us to love, to appreciate, to cherish, to choose to love, appreciate and cherish another person. It is that ability which allows us know the value of being loved, appreciated, and cherished whether by another person, a pet, or even God. Of course, we are also free to choose to love, appreciate and cherish silly things like a car, a house, a pair of shoes or money. Free will allows us to choose what we value. True, without freewill we couldn't choose to pour ourselves into silly things that don't really mean anything, but we couldn't truly love, appreciate and cherish God or each other either. The messiah John was looking for programs us, enslaves, takes away our free will. John's messiah was a strong man, making everyone bend to his will by sheer force. But our freewill is one of the biggest ways we are created in the image of God. And God does not take that away. Instead, God comes as One who gives sight to the blind, cleanses those who are diseased, brings hope to those with nothing, raises the dead, and serves the broken. Jesus does not enslave. He empowers. He invites you to see more. He invites you to see beyond this broken world. He invites you to choose a new world where death is not the end, where threats have no say, and where power is used to lift others up. He says, "I know, this world is not right. This is not how it is supposed to be." Then shows us how true that is as this world puts to death the Son of God for being a servant to the broken. Yet because He is the Messiah, the chosen, anointed One of God; the story doesn't end there. His way leads to resurrection. He gives His life so that your "this is not right" circumstances in this broken world do not get the last word. John's imprisonment, the lost investment, the broken family, the cancer, the unemployment, the crumbling health and intellect; they don't get the last word. For those that recognize who Jesus is, for those who use their freewill to follow Jesus, for those who chose servanthood over selfishness, and comradery over being combatants; Jesus heals all the wounds of this life and brings us to new life, eternal life with Him, a place where people who chose to follow the servant lifestyle gather and each is served by every other. We call it God's will. We call it heaven. And each time we choose to serve, each time we choose to forgive, each time we use our free will to lift up another even when they don't deserve it, each time we choose to love, appreciate and cherish God and our neighbor; there is a little more heaven on earth. And isn't that what Christmas is all about? It is about Jesus coming to be with us, to touch our lives, to be a little heaven on earth, so we can change from being citizens of this broken world, to citizens of heaven.

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