



Advent 3, Year A – December 12, 2010

Matthew 11 2.11

A Homily preached by the Rev'd Tara Livingston

He tried to be a good boy. He tried to be obedient when his mothers' voice tinged with exhaustion and exasperation broke through his self imposed silence. He ran as fast as his little legs could carry him back to the small house in which he lived. He tried to be a good boy but he also knew that he wasn't supposed to wander that far from home.

Boys; children can be cruel. He heard the taunts chanted behind his back by the other kids his age. He knew what they said when his mother walked up, stooped over and unsteady with grey hair and lines in her face. He knew that they called her granny and whispered that he'd really been found on the side of the road in a basket; an abandoned child with no one to love him.

But he knew the truth. He knew that he was in fact the son of a mother who was past her child bearing years when she gave birth to him. He also knew, because his mother told him all of the time, that he was the most desired and most beloved child ever in the history of humanity. And in his child's heart he felt this to be true and also bore the weight of every hope his parents carried and the responsibility of fulfilling every dream they'd ever had.

He was very smart, this young John. He pestered his father Zachariah, a priest, to teach him everything he knew. He learned to read not through conventional means – word by word as taught by tutors because that was only for the wealthy. No, young John learned to read by listening and memorizing every scripture that he ever heard as he pretended to read along with the old scroll at the back. Then suddenly one day the marks on the page began to make sense and began forming words in his own voice in his head. He could read, and read he did.

He grew up knowing that he was going to do something amazing. The more he read, the more he listened the more he knew that he was living in a special moment in the history of the world. He knew that it would be in his lifetime that the promised Messiah would come.

The silence that he retreated to, the one that his mother's exasperated voice would call him away from, was not silence at all. In his mind he heard the ancient prophets speak to him as if they were standing right there beside him.

Isaiah 35.4 "Say to those who are of a fearful heart, "Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God. He will come with vengeance, with terrible recompense. He will come and save you."

Psalms 110 5.7 "The Lord is at your right hand; he will shatter kings on the day of his wrath.

He will execute judgment among the nations, filling them with corpses; he will crush heads over the wide earth.

He will drink from the brook by the way; therefore he will lift up his head."

Jeremiah 17.25 "then kings who sit on David's throne will come through the gates of this city with their officials. They and their officials will come riding in chariots and on horses, accompanied by the men of Judah and those living in Jerusalem, and this city will be inhabited forever."

Daniel 2.44 "In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever."

Psalm 2.8-9 "Ask of me and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession. You will rule them with an iron scepter, you will dash them to pieces like pottery."

John knew that he would recognize the Messiah when he arrived.

Now John was not the only smart one in the family. His younger cousin, son of his Aunt Mary, was very bright as well. But whereas John was frenetic and full of a nervous kind of energy, Jesus was a still, calm presence in the midst of every crowd he was ever in. Whereas John would challenge the adults Jesus would merely counter them with a quiet thoughtful response. Whereas John's challenges angered the rabbi's, Jesus quiet wisdom disarmed them.

As John grew he became tall and imposing. With each passing year he became less interested in social graces and more obsessed with preparing the way for the promised Messiah. It was his job, his calling, to prepare an army from among the poorest labourers because the day was coming soon when the Messiah would come on a powerful steed wielding a shining long sword and his people would be freed from the bondage in which they now languished.

Now, John's activities had been angering the powers that be. He had been spreading the news of the arrival of an over-thrower – one who would come and topple the Romans. They arrested him and had him imprisoned. John knew that his cousin, Jesus, was out spreading a word of peace and love. They didn't see much of each other any more as their types of ministry rarely crossed over. But while he was in prison word came to him that not only was his cousin preaching he was healing the sick. And the solitude of John's imprisonment the prophecies, the prophecies to which he had not paid much attention, started to come back to him.

Isaiah 61 1.2 "The Spirit of the LORD God is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to captives, and freedom to prisoners; to proclaim the favourable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn."

All of those years of study, all of those years of silent meditation, all of those years of planning for the arrival of the messiah had now come to pass. It was not to be a bejewelled king riding on a chariot surrounded by warriors it was to be his cousin, his studious cousin with the still presence and quiet wisdom. It was to be Jesus preaching a message of peace and love. And John was happy to pave the way for him, to make his paths straight and to declare the arrival of the kingdom of God.

And for that, thanks be to God.