

Matthew 11:2-11
Advent 3A
2016

One of my favorite things about the Christmas season is all the lights.

We light things up at Christmas—

Trees,

Our windows,

Our whole houses.

We light things up to signal celebration,

Excitement.

And yet, multiple times this past week,

I found myself having conversations with people who find this season to be rather dark,

Those for whom no amount of Christmas lights can burn away the darkness that overshadows this season.

Many people struggle with Christmas.

Not necessarily the theology,

Or the belief,

Or the promise of Christmas. . .

But the celebration of it.

The festivity surrounding it.

The lights and sounds and cheer that go along with it.

For those who have lost a loved one,
Christmas is hard.

Whether it's the first Christmas without a beloved family member,
or the 10th Christmas without them,
Christmas is never the same with only the memories of that
person remaining.

It stings for some to sing of joy in the midst of deep sorrow.

For those who have lost their babies,
Babies who were newborns,
Babies who were still in the womb,
And even babies who weren't babies anymore but will
always be so in the hearts of their mothers and fathers.

For those who long to have a baby,
Those for whom that possibility has long come and gone.

This season is filled with the story of a birth,
A child,
A holy birth, a holy child, to be sure.
Nothing can change that.

But for those who have experienced such loss,
it stings to sing of a joyful birth in the midst of their deep grief.

For those who are sick this season,
 Those who are very sick this season,
 Those who wonder how many Christmases they have left.
For those who are feeling hopeless and fraught with worry and anxiety,
 Not to mention physical pain.
It stings for some to sing of hope and peace in the midst of deep
pain.

And this is only a glimpse of the suffering that surrounds us.

Relationships are broken,
 Jobs are lost,
 Dreams are shattered.

Wars rage.
 Gun shots ring out.
 Fear dictates life.

Hunger,
 Poverty.
Uncertainty,
 Self-doubt.

Sin.
 Death.

All of us at some point walk in darkness during this season,
 And some much more than others.

And so this season of waiting,
 And hoping,
 And hearing and telling and singing the story of Jesus Christ
 entering our world and our lives
 This season can seem quite dark,
 Even while it's lit up in twinkling bright lights.

We aren't the only ones who may find ourselves in darkness.

In the Gospel today,

We hear another voice from another dark place.

John the Baptist from his prison cell.

He sounds unsure.

He sends his disciples to ask Jesus if he's really the Messiah.

"Are you the one who is to come,

Or are we to wait for another?"

A question many of us might be asking even as we light our Advent candles,

And sing our hymns announcing the coming Messiah.

Even as we host and attend beautiful holiday parties,

Trim the tree and hang the lights,

Buy the gifts for all on our list.

"Jesus, are you the one who is to come,

Or are we to wait for another?"

Notice that Jesus never condemns John for asking.

Rather, Jesus seems to embrace it as an opportunity to give John some real, tangible answers.

"Go and tell John what you hear and see," Jesus tells John's disciples.

"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."

“Look and listen,” Jesus is saying.

“Look and listen, and you will see that I am the Messiah.

That I am the One for whom you wait,

That I am the One who is here,

And who is to come.”

Look and listen.

We can do that.

We can look and listen.

If that’s all we can do this season,

We can look,

And we can listen.

If that’s all we can do here right now,

We can look,

And we can listen.

Look at this gathering of God’s people,

All brought here to the same space this morning,

All bringing with us our own “stuff”,

All our eyes looking for the same Messiah to show up.

Look at this Table,

Wine,

Bread,

Given and shed.

The body and blood of the Messiah,

Broken and poured out for us.

And we don’t just feast with our eyes,

We get to feast with our whole selves.

Our bodies are filled with the gifts of mercy,

Forgiveness,

Comfort,

Joy,

Peace.

Even when our eyes are too tired to look,
Our vision too clouded by the things we wished for that never
came to be,
Here, our eyes are opened,
And we see that the Messiah is here!

Look and listen.

Listen to the anthems of praise,
Of promise,
Of peace.

Listen as we sing together the hymns of the season,
Hymns sung by voices that are strong,
And voices that are weak,
Voices that are confident,
And voices that are shaky.

Come to the font,
Splash in the water,
Listen to it!
Water that in baptism has drowned us to sin
And raised us to new life in the Messiah who is here.

Water that promises that the suffering of this world,
This life,
This season
Is being washed away,
And will one day be drowned completely in the
redemption through the Messiah.

Listen.

Even when our ears are stopped up,
When the cries of the needs around us seem too loud to process.
Here, our ears are opened,
And we hear the Messiah here.

Look and listen.

The story of Christ we proclaim this season does change things.

The story we proclaim does change the world.

It does change our lives.

And when we find ourselves in the dark,

Well, that doesn't change God's story for us.

That doesn't change God's redemption of us.

That doesn't change God's coming to us.

When we find ourselves in the dark,

God finds us,

Draws near to us,

And shines bright Christ light.