

Jesus is the Answer?
Matthew 11:2-7

When we tell others, "Jesus is the answer," it is only fair for them to ask of us: what is the question? Or to put it in the context of our Scripture: John the Baptist was confused because Jesus was answering questions that John the Baptist was not asking.

Anne spoke last week of how John the Baptist, the last of the Old time prophets, came preaching repentance and righteousness. He was preparing the way for Jesus; he said he was not worthy even to tie or untie Jesus' sandals, this at a time when attending to sandals was as menial a job as there was. So far so good. And then Jesus began to preach. Repent, for the kingdom has come near. So far so good.

But now something has happened. John has proclaimed: Jesus is the answer. But Jesus now seems to be the answer to a different question. And so John becomes the first of many righteous, religious people who take Jesus to task. For John, Jesus is the greatest one, but only as long as Jesus meets John's expectations. But now Jesus is doing different stuff, and John is beginning to ask: are you really the one? Or should we wait for someone else.

You see, here's what's going on. People were expecting the Messiah. It's Hebrew word, in Greek it's translated Christ, and it means God's anointed one. Now, God can anoint, that is metaphorically place oil upon someone to commission him or her for a specific task. But during

John the Baptist's time, the term Messiah, or Christ, had become something much more precise.

The Messiah was to be a descendant of King David who would be a great general and reestablish Israel as an independent, holy, righteous, earthly kingdom. And Jesus was showing few signs of being that sort of Messiah. Born in David's city to be sure, a descendant of David to be sure, but where was his army?

And besides, the righteousness of John the Baptist was a rigid and austere righteousness: he lived in the wilderness, apart from the stain-sinned world. He proclaimed a God fed up with sin. Go to John in the desert, and he says, you brood of vipers, who told you to flee from the wrath to come. But Jesus, he's gentle with sinners hangs out with them even eats with them. Scandalous behavior for a religious man, scandalous behavior for a Messiah.

Jesus is not turning out to be whom John expected. And yet. And yet. Jesus is the one whom John has proclaimed to be the answer to the question: who is the Messiah.

John is perplexed. John is confused. Jesus is befriending sinners instead of confronting them, and did nothing to call people to arms against Rome.

And so he must ask: Jesus, are you the answer? Or do we keep looking?

Jesus does not answer the question. Because that's one thing Jesus cannot do. He cannot answer

for you or for John who he is to you. You must answer that for yourself. Are you the one? That's the question John has his disciples ask.

And Jesus does not answer, but merely reports on what is happening through him. Go and tell John, Jesus says, what you have heard and seen. Blind people see, the lame walk, lepers are healed and are now allowed to touch and be touched, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news. Good news, another way to translate that is gospel, that gospel first preached to the shepherds, that to them, to them, living at the margins of society, to them a savior has been born. As a side note, Jesus does not promise earthly riches to the poor, but rather good news of a spiritual sort.

But John, John was expecting Jesus to be a firebrand, an avenging angel, someone who defended and protected the holiness of God. Instead, Jesus is turning out to be one who hangs out with folk no religious person was expected to hang out with.

Jesus simply doesn't fit simply into our notions of clean and unclean, righteous and un-. The ministry of Jesus is all messy and compassionate. He doesn't even have decent, learned disciples, but rather a ragtag gathering of fishermen and tax collectors and the like.

John, this is what's happening. Now, John, you decide, am I the one to come to usher in a new relationship between God and humanity? John, I can't answer that question for you.

John, what's your dream? Another new nation, or a new relationship with God, God and sinners reconciled?

And folks, here's the center of the sermon: sometimes even today, Jesus challenges us, confronts us, even disappoints us when our life of faith doesn't go the way we want it to.

Popular culture then wanted to turn Jesus into a political or military messiah. We want him to agree with our national wars and foreign policy.

And, Just the other day, I received an email from a group called "Christian Response" talking about how to get illegal aliens out of our nation. Now, this is a valid social, political, and security issue, which needs to be thoughtfully debated and thoughtfully decided. But is Jesus really so stridently against illegal aliens? Is Jesus really the answer to the question, "How do we get rid of illegal aliens?"

Popular culture today wants to turn Jesus into our magical, personal genie who can get us out of all sorts of trouble.

Others demand of Jesus that he return, and return now, to usher in a new creation.

But Jesus is God's idea of a Messiah, not ours. Jesus' power is not political or military, but spiritual. The boundaries of Jesus' power are not marked on a map, but rather in hearts.

Jesus began his life not in a posh palace, but a barn out back. His birth was not heralded by religious or national leaders, but rather by shepherds, and yes, angels.

So, it's no wonder John the Baptist wasn't quite sure. Is Jesus the one? And folks, sometimes Jesus doesn't do what we want or expect Jesus to do. But if we will allow it, then Jesus truly is Messiah, Lord, Savior. . . if we allow him to be not on our terms, but his.

Jesus might not be the answer to all our questions, but he is the answer to our most important ones.

Are you the one? John asked.

Well, the dead live. As I think of my mother-in-law, perhaps not living out this week, I think of how Jesus is her Messiah, he led her to live well, to live a Christian life filled with love, compassion, kindness. And now his is the power to allow her to die well, in hope, in expectation, that soon she will be set free from her stroke ravaged body.

The lame walk. Have you ever felt lame, spiritually perhaps? As if life holds only dull emptiness, and then suddenly something happens or someone gives you a kind word and suddenly you believe again that life holds new promises, possibilities. This is the kind of Messiah Jesus is.

Lepers are touched... Have you ever been a leper? Felt like an outcast? In Jesus, we are

welcomed back into the community, back into relationships with others.

And the poor, that is all, receive Good News. Have you ever felt beyond God's redeeming love because of mistakes you have made, sins you have committed? Well, you might be far off the path of righteousness, but Jesus is right there with you, in the briars and poison ivy of your life.

So, is Jesus the answer? He's not the answer John was expecting and not even always the one we want. But as we give our lives again to Jesus', as we live again in his mercy, his righteousness, as we fit our lives into his, rather than fit his life into ours, then we can answer John's question about Jesus. John asked, are you the one. And may our lives answer, yes, indeed, Jesus is the one. Amen.