

Third Sunday of Advent - A – 2023
Isaiah 35.1-6,10///James 5.7-10///Matthew 11.2-11

→I can't remember when I first heard it this year...but Advent and Christmas would not be the same if I didn't hear the popular song "Do you Hear What I Hear?"

→I'm sure you know it well...it begins:

Said the night wind to the little lamb...do you hear what I hear?

Way up in the sky, little lamb...do you hear what I hear?

→and the carol continues with all kinds of questions about what possibly could be heard in this season of expectation and wonder...

→and, it ends with the affirmation about the coming of the Lord...

→with broad chords and all voices singing in parts accompanied by full organ, the carol affirms in an explosion of confidence.... "*He will bring us goodness and light!*"

→when you look more closely...that song parallels a kind of good news/bad news scenario

→[you know]...it is always fun to deliver good news...to tell the winners of the sweepstakes, "*you won!*" or the job applicant, "*you're hired*" or the salesperson, "*you got the contract...we select you.*"

→but bad news is a different story, it drags us along sometimes without any joy or hope....we hate to hear bad news...and we hate to be the bearers of bad news as well.

→who wants to hear the meteorologist forecast seven straight days of snow and clouds...what group of investors wants to hear minimal predictions for the company...and how do you think alumni would respond to the new head coach telling them that he thinks the team will only win one or two games all season long?

→...we want good news!...we want fair skies, smooth sailing, winning seasons and solid returns...

→and woe to the prophet or CEO or coach or priest who might warn us differently!

→such negative predictions are usually rewarded with sarcastic laughter, awkward silence or outright avoidance and denial...

→these days our ears seem to be tuned only to the positive, upbeat music of optimism...

→and this thirst for good news...slanted or spun, toward the positive is not a new phenomenon...it has always been this way...especially among those in power...or those who stand to gain the most...

→in the first century, those in power included King Herod...a shrewd and paranoid ruler in Judea...who teamed up with religious and political officials of the day to preserve their power

→the iron fist of Rome was to be kept at bay...and that would happen if they maintained the peace in Judea....

→so no one was allowed to rock the boat...cause trouble...or make waves...

→that is until John the Baptist, with his unorthodox appearance, spoke up and began delivering his shattering message...it had to be like fingernails on a chalkboard to the minds of Herod and his supporters.

→it had been a long time since people had heard anyone preaching like John...some said it had not been since the time of the prophets Isaiah...

→so similar in nature were they that some call John the Baptist.. **the last of the Old Testament prophets**...and Isaiah the **first of the New Testament evangelists**...

→and that is also why Isaiah is the most-often quoted Old Testament book in the New Testament....

→these two preachers...separated by eight centuries...were united by a common bond call to proclaim the truth...even though that truth rubbed those in power the wrong way.

→and **this** is the message that continues today....

→last week we heard of John preaching in the desert...he warned of God's coming wrath...by preaching a baptism of repentance...urging us to prepare the way....make straight our paths.

→today...we hear of John sending messengers to Jesus asking the same question any one of us would ask... *"are you the one who is to come or are we to wait for another."*

→and Jesus quickly offers a response quicker than hitting the "send" button in an email...he says.... *"Go and tell John what you hear and see: 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....and blessed is anyone who takes no offense to me."*

→like that Christmas song.... “do you hear what I hear...do you see what I see...”

→for too many Advent seasons...we have heard this lesson and made all kinds of explanations as to why blindness and lameness, deafness and death, and the ravages of the poor are not healed, fixed, and made right...

→it is easy to wiggle around answers set up by thoughts such as “well Jesus is not among us anymore...or those were miracles that happened back then...but such things don’t happen these days.... and so on...

...but.....what do we hear and see....today?

PAUSE

→three candles now burn ...the third...lighted today, marks the midpoint of our Advent journey....

→this candle often called the candle of joy...announcing wonder and celebration....

→reminding us that no matter how dark the night may seem, or how brutal life might become, or how empty the loneliness may get....God brings and gives His light into our troubled world...

...what do we hear and see...

→I want to believe...and I hope you do as well...that the promises of the prophets...and the hope of John the Baptist is still very much alive in our world and lives today.....

→that Jesus Christ is not coming to us....but that he is already here...among us....in each of us...spreading his message to all...

→and His grace....his life and resurrection..... is a part of all of us...in the way we live, and speak and act...

→and **that** is exactly what this season of anticipation and preparation is all about

→and the beautiful decorations...the evergreen smells...and warm music...the bold pageantry of this time of year...all come together to put you and me in a place where we can hear and see...as God sees us...

created in his image....loved from before the heavens existed...and wanted now and always...as his children....

→and so, in these waning moments of Advent with but two weeks until Christmas....we might do good to ponder the question of Isaiah, John the Baptist and that ever so popular song

“what.....do you hear and see?”