

The Third Sunday in Advent

December 15, 2019



Matthew 11: 2-11

Jesus and John the Baptist

2 When John, who was in prison, heard about the deeds of the Messiah, he sent his disciples 3 to ask him, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?"

4 Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: 5 The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. 6 Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me."

7 As John's disciples were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swayed by the wind? 8 If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in kings' palaces. 9 Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. 10 This is the one about whom it is written: "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you."

11 Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."

A reflection by Ellen Smith, mission co-worker based in Germany, serving also in Russia and Belarus

"Are you the one who is to come, or shall we wait for another?" *The one?* Who are they waiting for? They wait for the Messiah. They want to know how they will recognize him. They have expectations. Under the harsh rule of Rome, they hope for a warrior to liberate them and wipe out their oppressors.

Jesus's response, calling on the words of Isaiah 35, answers their question, but not as they expected. The Messiah is in their midst, but not as a warrior. "...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." He is a Messiah who brings healing, redemption, salvation, but not according to their expectations.

Jesus calls them back to themselves: What did you seek in the wilderness: a reed shaken by the wind, someone dressed in soft robes? The Messiah has not come to falter. The Messiah is not an earthly prince or king. He has come to heal the sick and bring hope.

What are the signs of healing and hope in your midst? In Russia, I think of Davydovo, where the church community cares for the families with disabled children; children rejected by a society that wants soft robes: physical beauty and fancy cars. I think of the Roma community, rejected by the larger society as dirty and untrustworthy. Despite their poverty, they use their meager resources to travel to other Roma communities and share the Good News, offering hope. I think of MPC Social Services, reaching out to trafficked peoples who have been deceived and robbed, and are alone in a foreign land. They reach out with medical support and food parcels; hope for the day at hand and a refuge. These are communities that are about healing: the healing that is found in the love of Christ.

Where is hope needed in your neighborhood?

Ellen

To learn more about Ellen's ministry, visit pcusa.org/alan-and-ellen-smith.