

## **Is You the One?**

*December 16, 2007*

(Advent 3 - Year A)

Matthew 11: 2-11

*St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Waco, Texas*

After reading today's Gospel passage from Matthew, my mind went back to a movie that I remembered seeing when I was in elementary school.

The movie was called: "The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman."

In this movie from the 1970s, Cicely Tyson played an old African-American woman named Miss Jane Pitman, who was over a hundred years old.

In the movie, Miss Jane recalled her entire life, going back to her slavery in the 1860s, then through the Civil War, Reconstruction and segregation.

Throughout her whole life, Miss Jane was looking for freedom and a better life.

She was looking for the person who would lead her people into a new life of freedom and equality.

When Miss Jane Pittman was handed a new baby, named Jimmy, she stared into this new baby's face and asked if this baby would grow up to be the man to lead her people into equality.

As she looked at this new baby in her arms, she asked:

"Is you the one?"

Is you the one, Jimmy?"

In the Gospel of Matthew, John the Baptist is in prison, asking the same question:

"Is you the one?"

Is you the one, Jesus?"

John the Baptist was the great forerunner of the Messiah, who prepared the way in the wilderness for Jesus.

John the Baptist baptized Jesus in the Jordan River, beginning Jesus' active ministry.

Yet John the Baptist had spouted off his mouth one time too many to King Herod, and had gotten himself landed in prison.

When John the Baptist hears from prison that Jesus is out in the world doing his healing thing, John sends a message out to Jesus, asking: “Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?”

Jesus sends word back to his buddy, John the Baptist:

“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.”

If you notice, Jesus does not answer John’s question directly.

John the Baptist asks:

“Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?”

But Jesus does not reply with a yes or no answer.

Instead, Jesus lists the things that he is doing, Jesus lists his acts of healing and preaching.

We come into this church today and ask the same question that John the Baptist asked:

“Is Jesus the one?

Is Jesus the real deal, or are we to wait for another?”

It seems to me that some people have already asked this question.

They have looked for Jesus through God’s Church, but they have decided to wait for another.

In last Thursday’s Waco Trib, there was a newspaper article about Christianity in Western Europe right now.

In that article, it was reported that churches are going up for sale across Europe.

Beautiful and stunning cathedrals and chapels are empty.

Churches are closing up to become residences or business offices.

A recent survey even found Britons to be ignorant of the Christmas story, with 27 percent of adults unable to name Bethlehem as

Jesus' birthplace.

Keep in mind that the Church of England is the mother church of the Episcopal Church and is still the established church in England. The news is disheartening, at best.

It seems that some of our European brothers and sisters are looking for Jesus in their amazing and magnificent and empty churches and cathedrals and asking:

“Is you the one?”

Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?”

And people, by the droves, are answering that question by turning away and waiting for another.

People are turning to Islam, where European mosques are full.

People are turning to secular religion, whose holy day of consumption has almost completely erased the observance of Advent off the calendar.

People are turning to consumerism, whose cathedral parking lot is always full, from what I see at Richland Mall.

You see: you and I and the world outside this cozy little church are frantic for an answer to John the Baptist's question.

We frantically thumb through stacks of catalogs that stuff our mailboxes looking for the perfect gift,

We frantically work ourselves silly at our jobs,

We frantically search into the eyes of each baby that we hold, asking in desperation:

“Is you the one?”

Is you the one to free me from my bondage, or am I supposed to look for another?”

And we turn to Jesus' Church for the answer that we so desperately seek.

For there are only two real responses from the Church of Jesus Christ to the question:

“Are you the one - or are we to wait for another?”

Either the Church of Jesus Christ can respond by being a nice, pretty, little place, a safe little club you can belong to, like the PTA or the tennis club or a bunco group.

Or the Church of Jesus Christ can respond by saying:

This is what we hear and see happening here:

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.

If the Church of Jesus Christ, if St. Alban's Episcopal Church, wants to just be a nice pretty little club,

Then we will follow in the footsteps of our European brothers and sisters - with magnificent - and empty - church buildings - with 'for sale' signs in front.

However, the good news, my friends, about *this* community, about *this* church, is that this place called St. Alban's is not a club.

This place is *alive* with the spirit of Jesus.

Do you all realize how exciting and energizing it is for me to be the rector of St. Alban's Episcopal Church?

I am energized and excited because I am a part of this church, just like you.

Yet I also get the privilege to lead and to be here, day in and day out.

And I can truly say:

Come to St. Alban's and see and hear what is happening here:

The blind receive their sight - as people are picking up their Bibles and seeing Jesus Christ in a new way.

The lame walk - as people are realizing that faith is not a destination, but a journey to be walked.

The lepers are cleansed - as your pain and sin are washed away and remembered no more.

The deaf hear - as the message of loving your neighbor is being heard.

The dead are raised - as old ministries are being resurrected into new and life-giving ministries.

The poor have good news brought to them - as we attract a diverse group of people, who all hear the good news that they are loved by God for who they are.

Is you the one?

Or are we to wait for another?

My friends, we don't have to wait any longer.

Don't go looking at the mall or in your liquor cabinet or in your bank account.

Jesus is the real deal and he works and heals and preaches and lives among us, in this community, and out in the world.

John the Baptist asks his buddy, Jesus:

“Are you the one who is to come,

Or are we to wait for another?”

The waiting is over, John.

Because the one who is to come....is here.

AMEN.

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