

2016-12-11 – 8.00am Sue Diggory
Advent 3: Matthew 11: 2 – 10

How does it feel when things don't turn out the way you expect, the way you had hoped for.

Can you think of a time when you had it all mapped out in your mind; you knew exactly how things should unfold but then ... in reality it was all very different, nothing turned out to be what you had expected?

I've had a bit of that recently!

How did you feel sad, angry, disappointed or perhaps just bewildered that you had got it so wrong?

I wonder if this was how John felt as he languished in one of Herod's prison cells. He had been so sure, so sure that Jesus was the Messiah but now the doubts were creeping in as he heard reports of what Jesus was doing, as he heard reports of Jesus' unfolding ministry in and around Galilee.

John knew his scriptures and as he lay in prison what he heard and what he expected of the Messiah did not add up. Messiah was the expected one, the one who would come and sweep through Israel and bring restoration to God's people, the Jews. John was expecting a Messiah who would come in power another Elijah who would come and restore the power and might of little Israel the land of God's chosen people.

Yet Jesus wasn't a bit like this; he sent out his disciples to heal the sick and raise the dead, and to drive out demons. He spent his time associating with those on the fringe of respectable society; the tax collectors, those who colluded with the Romans, the prostitutes; those who any self-respecting Jew wouldn't want to be seen with!

So now John was having doubts ... this wasn't how it was all supposed to unfold and so he sent some of his disciples to check Jesus out; to find out what was going on and to report back!

In verse 2 John's disciples ask *"are you the one who is to come or should we wait for another?"*

Jesus simply tells them to go back and tell John what they have heard and seen; but not to confirm John's fears but rather to confirm that John is right; he is right to see his cousin as the messiah, the one who would come to set his people free because he John is the one sent by God to prepare the way, the one who was to be the last prophet; the one who would be the end of the line of those sent to warn and prepare God's people for the breaking in of the kingdom in a totally new way.

And so Jesus goes on to quote the prophet Malachi who wrote 400 years earlier that God would *send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare the way before you*, the one who like Elijah would call God's people back, but the one who would prepare the way for the Messiah, Jesus, the one who comes to usher in the kingdom in a new way, an unexpected way, the way of servant-hood the way of redemption and new life, the way of freedom from slavery and bondage but also the way of mercy and forgiveness for those who are prepared to follow in his pathway; the pathway of divine humility and sacrifice and not the pathway of human power and greed.

And so if we go full circle and ask with John *are you the one who was to come* my prayer is that each one of us can say yes, but an even greater yes than that as we serve Jesus; the one who came once and for all as a tiny baby; the one who as we journey through advent we prepare to welcome afresh as Emmanuel, God with us, knowing that we need not expect anyone else!