

McCabe United Methodist Church
Advent and Christmas 2016: "All I Want for Christmas"

"What Are You Looking For?"

Sermon on Matthew 11:1-11 (12-10 & 11.2016)
Pastor Mark Ehrmantraut

Holy and Merciful God, we come this morning seeking. Prepare our minds and open our hearts. Help us to experience your presence and to hear you speak to us through worship today. May the words of my mouth and the meditations on each of our hearts be acceptable in your sight. Amen.

Consider the first Christmas gifts of the season. When they show up under the tree, do you ever sneak a peak? Maybe give one a little shake? Or, you know, sometimes the package isn't wrapped right or the tape somehow gets a little loose. We're tempted to take a peak...

Why do we do this? What are we looking for?

I ask because in this week's Scripture Jesus is asking some disciples, What are YOU looking for?

These guys weren't Jesus' disciples.

They were John the Baptist's disciples.

Remember John the Baptist?

John's ministry was to prepare the Way for the Lord.

John's ministry was to lead people from sin to their Savior.

This is the John the Baptist who actually baptized Jesus.

At the time of our Scripture John was in prison. He'd offended the king and sitting in jail those thoughts crept in. Is Jesus really the Savior?

Because the Savior would be The Messiah, God's Chosen One.

THE triumphant, powerful king **AND** the HOLY high priest...

But Jesus didn't really look like OR act like a King.

Jesus didn't really talk like or teach like the priests.

So John sent a couple of his own disciples to confirm that Jesus was the Savior.

And it's with this in mind that I'd invite you to hear again today's Scripture. A reading from: **Matthew Chapter 11...**

11:2 When John heard in prison (John was in prison and he heard) what the Messiah (Jesus) was doing, (xxhe) (John) sent word by his (by John's) disciples 11:3 (Through his disciples, John) said to (xxhimxx) (Jesus), "Are you the one who is to come, or (should xxarexx) we wait for (someone else xxanotherxx)?"

In other words, what should we be looking for?

In many ways Jesus didn't seem like the Messiah they were expecting. Jesus didn't ride the mighty white horse. Jesus wasn't raising up a powerful army. Jesus wasn't living in a palace. He didn't seem to intent to overthrow Jerusalem.

Instead Jesus was basically homeless and living from meal to meal. 11:4 Jesus answered (John's disciples saying:) (xxthemxx), "Go and tell John what you hear and see: 11:5 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.

What more could you be looking for?

11:6 And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me." (In other words Jesus was saying: I'm not here to win a popularity contest. I may offend some people doing God's will, but the reality is that I'm here to bring healing and hope. I'm here to save people from their sin...

Our Scripture continues 11:7 As (xxtheyxx John's disciples) went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: (Jesus said:) "What did you (the people in the crowd... what did you) go out into the wilderness to look at? (**What were you looking for...???**) ...a reed shaken by the wind?

11:8 (xx**What then did you go out to see?**xx) (**What were you looking for?**) Did you go out to see someone dressed in soft robes and living in a palace? (Remember this idea of a Messiah, of the Mighty Ruler, the Warrior King) (What were you looking for)? Someone dressed in soft robes? Living in a palace? Because here's Jesus basically with the clothes on his back and in many respects homeless.

11:9 (xx**What then did you go out to see?**xx) (What were you looking for?) A prophet? (John the Baptist sure sounds like a prophet. He called people from sin and pointed them to their Savior and he was blunt about it. There wasn't any fine print. Repent. Believe. And Change your life.

Our Scripture continues: Yes, I (Jesus) tell you, (xxandxx John's) more than a prophet. 11:10 (And Jesus continued) This is the one about whom it is written, 'See, I am sending my messenger (John) ahead of you. (xxwhoxx He) will prepare your way before you.' 11:11 Truly I tell you, among those born of women (and that's all of us... among those born of women) no one (has been or is xxhas arisenxx) greater than John the Baptist; and yet) the least (of those) in the kingdom of heaven. They're (still) greater than (xxhexx) (John is).

What are you looking for?

You must be looking for something. What are you trying to find?

We peek at a package under the Christmas tree and give it a little shake. What are we looking for?

How do we answer the question that frames our Advent and Christmas series:
All I want for Christmas is...

What are we looking for?

Do you know Rose Kennedy? President Kennedy, JFK's mom.

Rose Kennedy was at a Bible study. During the study, the people were challenged to be ready to meet the Lord. They were challenged to keep turning from sin and to turn toward their Savior...

When the meeting was over, Rose Kennedy told the teacher that she'd already done what he was suggesting.

Rose said: When she was newly married, she was into the power and the money. She said she was selfish and living for her own desires. And then she gave birth to a beautiful little girl with mental retardation...

Rose said they were devastated. They were mad at God. They were bitter toward God. And every ounce of joy was sucked from their lives.

Then one night they were supposed to go to a party but Rose decided she shouldn't go. She was scared of herself. She was scared of her reaction. She said if someone said the wrong thing about her little girl she might come unglued.

Rose's anger was consuming her...

That night, one of Rose's maids said: Mrs. Kennedy I've been watching you these past few weeks. You're so angry. I'm worried about you. If you don't do something about it, it'll ruin you.

I think you should pray this prayer...

Rose fired the maid on the spot.

But Rose couldn't sleep that night. She tossed and turned, and then, in an act of deep surrender, she prayed this simple prayer:

O Lord, make my heart a manger, where the Christ child can be born.

A simple prayer of surrender.

A simple prayer for help.

O Lord, make my heart a manger, where the Christ child can be born.

Rose Kennedy said she'd always been religious. She was Catholic. She believed in Jesus. But that night was different.

On that night, Rose opened her heart to Jesus in a new way.

On that night, her heart became a manger.

On that night, Love replaced anger, and the deepest wounds in her soul began to heal.

We hear the words of Jesus. Words of comfort and words of confrontation.

What are YOU looking for?

In case you're wondering, Rose Kennedy rehired the maid she'd fired. This woman worked for the Kennedys until the day she died.

We come this morning and maybe you're a religious person or maybe you're not. Either way we come in the middle of the Advent season and we're reminded that that precious gift... That precious gift is there for you to open and to receive.

What are you looking for? Will you open and receive the gift we've each been given?

Let's pray: I'll pray it two times. I invite you to join with me as you might be ready and as is appropriate for you. Join me as you wish.

O Lord, make my heart a manger where the Christ child can be born.

***O Lord, make my heart a manger where the Christ child can be born.
Amen.***