

12/15/13 3 Advent A

Are you the one who is to come or should we look for another?

-- John the Baptist's question in our gospel may surprise us. We tend to think that the main players in salvation history knew their roles well and knew how things would work out. John did not have a reputation for uncertainty, but now he seems genuinely confused about Jesus.

-- After all, Jesus had not challenged the Roman oppressors or directly confronted Jewish leaders as John had confronted Herod. Jesus had a modest following but wasn't really changing the religious or moral landscape. What was up with this distant cousin of his?

-- So, from the prison cell Herod had put him in, he sent this question to Jesus' main disciples. He was not certain. Jesus had some of the qualities the scriptures said the Messiah would have, but some didn't seem to fit him. So he was questioning, as we often do.

-- As we read this gospel, a question should arise in each of us: *Who am I looking for? What type of Messiah do I seek?* It's so easy to look for a god who fits our image, rather than allowing God's word to form our image of God. Just a few examples:

-- Some people seek a "fire and brimstone" type of messiah. This messiah condemns all their enemies and consigns them to hell. But he does not challenge their own views or prejudices.

-- Others seek a messiah who holds forth as most important their pet cause. That cause may be a good one (e.g., protecting human life, justice for immigrants, religious freedom, protection for Palestinians), but by itself it is a narrow lens to view God's entire message.

-- Still others seek a messiah who loves unconditionally but makes no demands upon them. God **does** love unconditionally, but he is not Santa Claus. He seeks a free response of love from us.

-- And there are people who look for a messiah who will give his blessing to the latest ideas in society without any criticism. If modern society thinks it's OK, that's what God should endorse.

-- That stream of thought reminds me of the people Jesus describes as going out to see a reed shaking in the wind. John the Baptist certainly was not that reed; neither is Jesus Christ.

-- How did Jesus answer John's question? He pointed to what his ministry was all about: not solving world problems, but healing the sick; not changing political structures, but preaching the Good News to the poor. Modest accomplishments, but significant in their own right.

-- God's work is done today, for the most part, in such small but significant ways. As many of you know by now, Pope Francis was chosen as *Time* magazine's "Person of the Year."

-- In the 8 months he's been Pope, he hasn't changed Church structures or modified Church teaching. He's started some reforms of Vatican offices, but much more is still to be done.

-- But the small things he's done have meant so much: asking people to pray for him before giving his blessing, washing the feet of prisoners, stopping to embrace handicapped people, paying his own bills.

-- We, too, show what type of messiah we believe in by the little things: how we treat waiters when we go out to eat, how we greet people when we are very busy, our willingness to give to those less fortunate.

-- Yes, it's easy to seek a Messiah made in our own image. But, when we do so, we are making an idol for ourselves. May we be open to God's word. May we allow that word to change our lives and hearts, so we will seek and follow the true Messiah.