

## THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

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The Rev. J.D. McQueen, II - All Saints' Episcopal Church, San Diego, CA

“Stir up thy power, O Lord, and with great might come among us”

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Advent is a season of *waiting*, but *also* of *urgency* – we’re *watching*, yes, but we’re on the *edge* of our *seats*, and today’s collect reminds us *why*.

- “Stir up thy power, O Lord, and with great might come among us,” calling God to action
- We’re “sorely hindered by our sins...*speedily* help and deliver us,” don’t wait, the situation is desperate
- We see that sense of urgency for God to act in today’s gospel lesson too.

From prison, John sends his disciples to ask Jesus, “Are *you* he who is to *come*, or *shall* we look for *another*?”

- Jesus replies by *listing* the things he’d been *doing*, irrefutable *proof* that *yes*, he *is* the Messiah.
- But of course the passage *begins* with Matthew telling us that *hearing* about *these deeds* is the *reason* they’ve come with *questions*.
- So what’s going on here? A couple of things.

The *first* is unmet expectations.

- Here you have *Jesus* pointing to *miraculous* healings and restoration, and *they’re* saying, “OK, but what about the *winnowing* fork, the *axe*, and the *unquenchable fire*? John said there’d be lots of *fire*.”
- They’d *probably* gotten so caught up in the *popular* idea of a *holy conqueror* that they were *oblivious* to the *fulfilment* of the *actual* messianic *prophecies*.

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Along with those expectations is the *sentiment*, “What are you *waiting* for? If you’re the *Christ*, do something!”

- Now, when Jesus hears this *same* thing on the *cross*, he doesn’t *respond* because it’s from those who’ve *already* decided that he’s *not* the Messiah.
- *This* is much closer to *another* scene from the gospels – where the man whose son is possessed by a demon *cries* out in *desperation*, “I *believe*, help my *unbelief*!”

John’s disciples aren’t *quite* convinced that Jesus is the Messiah *yet*, but they *want* him to be – they *want* him to be because if he *is*, there’s *hope*.

- There’s *hope* for their dear friend *John*, who they know will almost *certainly* be killed in prison otherwise.
- There’s *hope* for their *people* who are *oppressed* and occupied by the *Romans*.

Just like in the *collect*, John’s disciples are *crying* out for *action* in a *desperate* situation,

and I think Jesus is speaking to *all* of that when he affirms that *yes*, he *is* the Messiah, and *adds*, “And *blessed* is he who takes *no* offense at *me*.”

- He’s speaking to their *unmet expectations*, saying, “I’m the Messiah. *Stop* looking for the one you *want* to follow; the one who *says* what you want to *hear* and *leads* you where you want to *go*.”
- He’s speaking to their *desperation*, saying, “Don’t lose hope when I’m *not* who you *expect* me to be. Don’t be *discouraged* when I don’t *do* what you want me to *do*, when you want me to *do* it.”

Advent reminds us that when the circumstances of our lives leave us crying out for God, he’s already come – he *is* with us and that he *is* at work in our lives.

- God wants us to *know* that and be *comforted*, which we see in Jesus’ response, and that can happen when we establish our hearts, as James tells us in his letter.

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When we establish our hearts, we're making them firm by rooting them in Jesus, with the intention that they'll remain that way forever.

- For this to happen, we have to take time *every day* to fix our hearts and minds on Jesus by reading and praying the gospels.
- When we do this, we give him the space to show us what he's doing and strengthen our trust in him.

If you don't have that much time or you're not sure how to pray, don't worry – just do it.

- The most important part isn't the amount of time or the quality of your prayer – it's the "*every day*," because that means we're *choosing* God, *even* when we don't *feel* like it.
- If we just *show up* and *make* the effort to *be* with Jesus – even if we'd *rather* be doing something *else* or we're fighting *distraction* that whole *time* – *he will bless us*.

How incredible is it that the Word of God, who created the universe, became man, and died for us, loves us so much that if we just *show up* he'll take care of the rest?

- Jesus is so generous that he'll deepen our prayer and, when our desire for him grows, he'll provide more opportunities for us to meet him.
- So don't wait to establish your heart – the coming of the Lord is at hand, and he's longing to fill it.