

A Advent 3

Theme: What are you looking for? Matt11.2-11

- ◆ What are you looking for?
- ◆ Are you looking in the right places?
- ◆ Will you know it when you find it?
- ◆ What will you do when you find it?
- ◆ No these are not just the questions every Christmas Shopper must ask themselves before they embark, but they are some of the great Advent questions. They are the questions that lie behind our Gospel reading this morning.
- ◆ Jesus asked the Crowds ‘What are you looking for?’ What did they go out into the wilderness to see when John was preaching? Clearly crowds don’t go out into the dessert to see the things that are there all the time; sand and reeds, rocks and hills. They went out looking for a prophet, they went out looking for signs of God at work in the world.
- ◆ John the Baptist knew exactly what it was that he was looking for and he wanted to know if he had found it in Jesus. Jesus doesn’t say, ‘Yes, it is me.’, instead he points to what is going on around him. To the healing of the sick and the raising of the dead, that the poor have good news. Because John knew what he was looking for he could recognise it when he saw it, he didn’t have to depend on any one else pointing it out to him or telling him what to think.
- ◆ So what are we looking for? One of the first things we need to learn as disciples of Christ is to look for the right things. There are all sorts of things that human beings need, want and desire. Some of them are good for us, some of them are bad, some will be a real disappointment, others a great joy, many will just leave us unsatisfied. Jesus tells us that what we

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need to seek first is the Kingdom of God. Christian discipleship is in part about learning to want what is good, learning to seek and love God and the truth.

- ◆ This schooling of the desires is one of the purposes of prayer and worship. We pray and come together to worship to learn what really matters, to discover what the Kingdom of God is.
- ◆ Unfortunately The Kingdom of God is a great mystery, it is not obvious or straight forward at all. We learn about it through parables and paradox. It is among us now and yet still to come. It will turn everything on its head and yet if we are not on the look out for it we might not even notice it coming. It will come like a burglar after bed time so we need to keep awake. We need to watch what is going on around us, we need to be awake and alert to the signs of the times, but we need to pray for God to help us interpret what we see. It is through watching and praying that we will understand what it is we are looking for and we will be able to recognise it when it comes.
- ◆ Once you know what to look for and how to recognise it the next problem is where to look. The Magi remind us how easy it is to look for things in the wrong places. The people who Jesus scolds in the Gospel at least knew their Bible well enough to know that the wilderness was a good place to be looking for God and his Kingdom.
- ◆ The wilderness is a theme that runs through Advent, because it is in the wilderness that the prophets tell us that we will see the first signs of God's coming Kingdom. It is easy to see God at work in the wilderness because there are fewer distractions and the needs are clear. We are more likely to be able to recognise God in the wilderness because we are

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stripped of the comforts and luxuries that shield us from the harsh realities of life. When all that is comfortable and easy is absent we can see clearly how utterly we depend on God.

- ◆ The obvious question is where is the wilderness here in Wimbledon? Is it out on the common, is it somewhere else in our city. Do we need to go out to Snowdonia or the Cairngorms to find the wilderness?
- ◆ The wilderness can be both within us and beyond us. It can be the dry and desolate regions of our own souls, or it can be places like the night shelter. There are plenty of wilderness places in the city and in our hearts if we keep our eyes open. We need to watch and pray in them, if it is signs of God's kingdom we are seeking.