

December 11, 2022
Third Advent

Matthew 11:2-11

“New Shoes for Old”

When I went to Seminary it was both a great opportunity and culture shock to be there. I had never lived in the Northeastern United States, and I struggled with how to make myself at home in a foreign land.

Right before Christmas, I heard the old Carol – ***as if for the very first time***. Join me if you like - *“I’ll be home for Christmas, you can plan on me. Please have snow and mistle toe and presents on the tree. Christmas Eve will find me: where the love light gleams. I’ll be home for Christmas – if only in my dreams, if only in my dreams.”*

This was a powerful song for me – because it reminded me *that every day I was trading new shoes for old – and I needed to know that it was going to be okay; That my belonging to what mattered would be **stronger when I took the risk to trade new shoes for old.***

In our text today we have the two great spiritual leaders in that day for what would become our faith – and ***they show us*** how to make the most of trading new shoes for old. The first trade we need to make on this adventure with God is ***our understanding of what makes someone great***. In our materialistic culture some people get away with murder because they have the money to navigate the system. There are also people who land in jail with the ***smallest provocation*** because they don’t have the money or social standing to be considered important. So, what makes for greatness? What should we honor? Jesus is a *poor itinerant preacher* who offers grace to those who can’t pay. John is a firebrand preacher demanding ethical adherence – and even though community leaders find him interesting, *his preaching lands him in jail*. And once there he is vulnerable to the whims of a drunken ruler who has him executed. Would we call that great? As we approach the coming of the Messiah anew, we need to trade our old understanding ***of what is impressive, what shows greatness and who matters the most*** for new understanding *embodied by Jesus and John*.

Perhaps that’s not hard for you. The next trade we need to make might be harder. ***What do we expect from God’s anointed one.*** So many people in Jesus’

time were sure the Messiah would ride into town on a large war horse and throw the bums out. *We would be OK with that too* – as long as we get to say who the bums are and aren't. Jesus' teaching does not contradict John's. But ***it is different***. So different that John sends Jesus a messenger – “Did we make a mistake when we thought you were the one...because there is a whole lot of not enough going on.”

Enough of what? *Enough of neutralizing the wicked and doing things like John did*. John is the forerunner of Jesus – and John understands he passes the baton to Jesus who carries it forward. The *same* baton John has been carrying. But Jesus doesn't seem to be filling John's shoes. Jesus offers him a trade. ***New shoes for Old***. Give up the notion that there will be a *clean sweep of the powerful* and look at what I am doing: Healing, encouraging, sending – *those whom no one gives a second look*.

We need to trade our understanding of greatness in life. We need to trade in our ***expectations of the Messiah*** making *everything* right. And we need to understand ***Jesus calls us to a new way of being***. ***It is a surrendering of our previous understanding*** of who we are meant to be. To trade in our *cultural conformity* for the understanding that to live redemptively – to live as the spiritual descendants of John and Jesus ***means there are times when faithful living will – by its nature – be counter cultural***.

That doesn't mean baptizing bad behavior because it is to our advantage. We aren't mean and rude because that *feels* counter cultural. We do ***weigh and consider everything we do*** – *who we choose to become* – and what we think is most important by *looking to the Messiah* who came to heal: heal individuals, communities, and those who will take him seriously.

Each time we trade new shoes for old – each time ***we choose for the way of Jesus*** – *we embody* what Christmas is all about. And it isn't just in a dream. This Christmas, let's get new shoes for old.