

**Sermon "Are You the One? Are We the One?"**  
**Third Sunday of Advent, December 14, 2025**  
**Rev. John Balicki**  
**St. Luke's Church, Wilton, Maine**

"Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" If that isn't a question that breaks your heart ... or maybe, it speaks a truth, many truths, that so often we can't find the words, or the strength, or the courage, to say. Have you ever been in a place like that? Perhaps you once had great hope over something or someone? Maybe it was personal. Maybe it was that first crush, that first boyfriend or girlfriend in the teen years? Or maybe a little later when you hoped and then wondered whether you had found your life partner? Or perhaps it related to a situation where you worked, hoping a new supervisor would change the workplace culture and make it a fairer and better place to work. Or perhaps you've asked that question about a political leader – a governor, a president, someone in whom you had great hope that things would change for the better. Or finally a religious leader – your new Rector, a new bishop, the new Pope? Someone who you had great hopes would make things better, be more inspiring, care about what's going on in the community or the world and give some reason to have more faith and hope. Just as natural as it is for humans to have hope and expectations, because we're human at some point that person in whom we place our hope (spouse, friend, president, priest) is bound to disappoint us and cause us to question. Are you the one? Are you the one? Or do I wait for another?

The doubt we hear expressed today comes from the lips of John the Baptist, one who knew Jesus, and it was about his own cousin, maybe more importantly the one he thought would be the Messiah. Today's gospel is much different from the one we heard last week; John the Baptist has gone from wilderness to pent-up-ness. From freedom to confinement. From wide-open spaces to the captivity of a cell.

A change of place causes a change of perspective. No longer in the wilderness, no longer baptizing in the Jordan River, no longer having people come to him, John is now in a different desert, no longer prophesying but questioning.

Jesus too is in a different place. As Matthew describes it, he is well into his public ministry of teaching and healing. He warns his followers of the persecutions they will face, including being "dragged before kings and governors", a fate similar to John's. Jesus reminds his followers that his message is meant to disrupt the world, bringing a sword rather than peace.

John becomes an example of the cost of such ministry and its disruption of the Roman concept of peace. John's baptismal ministry and messianic message stood in stark contrast to the peace through force the Romans imposed. This bold critique landed him in prison.

Roman prisons were spaces where one awaited trial or execution, unlike the long-term incarceration practices we are familiar with today. While being imprisoned was not meant as an ultimate punishment, it was a place of physical violence and psychological terror. Prisons were filthy, overcrowded, and devoid of natural light. Sanitation and basic resources like clean water were scarce. Beatings and restraints limited movement and stripped autonomy.

Despite how prison was intended to instill fear and shame not only in the incarcerated but in their loved ones, John is not abandoned by his followers. John's community remains in regular contact with him.

Physically, ancient prisons did not provide for the basic needs of the incarcerated, such as food and clothing. Thus, the community of the incarcerated had to visit them to provide sustenance. On psychological and interpersonal levels, John also relies on his community to connect him relationally to what is taking place in broader society. In doing so, the community helped counter the isolation and despair that could arise from incarceration. John needed his community to help him survive the multiple forms of imperial oppression he experienced, and they showed up for him.

Despite John's circumstances, he does not focus on himself, but instead focuses on Jesus. He needs to know if Jesus is the one they've waited for or if another is still to come. Is Jesus the one who will bring deliverance and new life in the midst of the violence and terror of the Roman occupation?

John's question—"Are you the one...?"—resonates in our present time. As ICE raids, detention centers, and mass deportations terrorize communities, many are asking: What is the good news for our times? How is God delivering God's people in these fear-filled times? Such realities and questions invite us to consider how we, as communities of faith, can respond. How might we be present with those seeking the Messiah in the midst of incarceration, family separations, and uncertainty? Jesus' response to John offers clues to how we might respond.

Jesus doesn't show his badge that identifies him as the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, nor does he offer a theological treatise. He says instead: "The poor have good news brought to them."

This phrase is often interpreted as sharing the gospel with the poor. The Greek reads, more literally, that the poor are "gospelized". They don't just receive good news. They experience it: they can now hear, see, walk, are clean enough to rejoin society. Those most vulnerable in society – like John in prison – receive the gospel not only through words but through actions and community relationships. Caring for those who are most vulnerable, oppressed, and ostracized is a sign of living out the good news, just as Jesus did throughout his ministry.

But as people of faith we are also people of doubt and it is only natural to wonder, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?". We ask this question from our own prisons that confine us to a limited imagination about God. It is the question we ask from our penitentiaries that can't see beyond the concrete walls of divide and difference.

"Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" is the question of longing – longing for what we dearly hope but then wonder if it can truly be. Longing for promises to come true when it seems that the cards are stacked against us. Longing for what was, but at the same time looking forward to what could be.

Can we make John's question our question? Let's not try to answer it or solve it, or tie it all up in a Christmas bow, but to lean in to the waiting, the wanting, and the wonder so as to hear God's answer. And while we are leaning and waiting, let's embody the good news by remembering we need to care for the forgotten in prisons and detention centers, shelters and hospitals. Then we are not just questioners but part of the one who is to come.