

Third Sunday of Advent Year A [2010]

Did you notice that the first two Sundays of Advent were all about us? They were calling us to awaken and to pay attention. They were a call for ourselves to awaken to knowing who we really are. Now this week we have moved on in the gospel to chapter 11 where, through the interchange between John's disciples and Jesus, we have an insight into who Jesus really is and what his characteristics are. Again Matthew takes as his source material for this passage which he finds in Mark's writings. He does however tidy it up a bit and get the quotations from the Hebrew Scriptures correct. (Matthew likes tidiness!) John is still not absolutely sure of who Jesus really is. After all John will have been familiar with the ideas of his time that the messiah was going to be some great powerful and grand figure who was going to smite all the enemies and take over from the oppressors of the Jewish nation. But Jesus' reply is taken mainly from the prophet Isaiah which point to quite a different sort of Saviour (healer). Now you can interpret all these activities in a literal, physical sense or in a metaphorical sense or perhaps they are both. The essential point made by them is that Jesus is the provider of "Good News."

Having dealt with the identity of Jesus, Matthew now tells us something about John. We will notice though that this isn't just about John. The description of John's appearance is that of Elijah, one of the great Hebrew prophets, the one who it is thought would come back to announce the coming of the Christ Messiah. Jesus' scripture quote comes from Isaiah but he applies it to John. But notice how Jesus doesn't say he is Elijah returned. John is described as great not because he is likened to Elijah but because of his own unique greatness. The same is true for you; your greatness is unique to you just as you are and not because you have copied someone else.

Questions for further thought or discussion

1. Do you think Christ is the sort of figure you expect?
2. Who are prophets for you?
3. How good are you at listening to those who are saying something different to what you have always thought?