

Yes
A Sermon for December 11, 2016
Matthew 11:2-6
[Lansdowne UMC](#)

At some point about 10 years ago I decided that I wanted to be a ham radio operator. I don't really remember what got me started on it. I knew that my grandfather was an expert at morse code and would use his ham radio to talk to people all over the world in an age before the internet. I also remember hearing about how ham radio operators provided emergency communications during Hurricane Katrina when nothing else was working.

Using a ham radio isn't something you can just jump into immediately. Even though you don't have to learn morse code anymore, there is a fair amount of technical knowledge you need to know so that you're a polite citizen on the radio waves and so that you don't disrupt other people's transmissions. Just like getting a license to operate a commercial vehicle, there are special licensing exams that you have to take to become a ham radio operator. If you are caught operating without a license you could get fined or even face jail time.

So one Christmas, I asked for books on taking the ham radio licensing exam. I think it was about three months later that the FCC gave me a call sign: KB3OWV. I was pretty excited about all of this so I was talking about it to anyone who would listen. I even ended up getting two of my co-workers to take the test and get licensed.

Well, fresh off a successful exam, I borrowed a little radio from my father-in-law and read the manual cover to cover. After studying for the exam and reading that book, I felt like I knew everything I could possibly know before diving in. Perhaps I did.

So I tuned in to a free space on the airwaves and called CQ-- that's the radio equivalent of shouting "is anybody out there!?" I transmitted for maybe 10 to 20 seconds and then stopped to listen. I heard nothing. So then I transmitted for another 10 to 20 seconds... and I still heard nothing. I changed frequencies and did the same thing. This continued on for quite some time. I looked at my radio and wondered, "Is it even working?"

John the Baptist went out into the desert-- a free space on the airwaves-- and he began broadcasting, "prepare the way for the Lord"-- "Repent and be baptized-- the kingdom of God is near!" And he began to baptize people, saying, "I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire."

Unlike my little amateur radio station, people were actually responding to John's call to repent and be baptized. Jesus himself came to John to be baptized. John in effect says to him, "Why are you coming to me? I need to be baptized by you!"

Eventually John gets himself into trouble, because he called King Herod out for marrying his brother's wife. Herod had him arrested and put in jail.

John had thrown his entire life into preparing the way for Jesus. He wore the uniform and ate the rations of the Old Testament prophet Elijah, wearing a coat of camel's hair and eating locusts and wild honey. He did the thing that the best of disciples to-- he pointed to Jesus. And then he was unceremoniously tossed into prison. You can imagine how John might start to doubt as he sat in his cell, nothing to do but consider the ways that Jesus did not seem to be fulfilling his expectations. "When are we going to see some action, Jesus? If you're really him, I don't want to tell you how to do your job, but right about now would be a great time for some of that Holy Spirit and fire stuff! Take your time... you know where to find me... rotting in jail! Because in case you haven't noticed, Herod is still in charge from his palace. Pontius Pilate is still running Jerusalem, and the same authorities are still in charge of the religious institutions. I had some really high hopes that you'd make things better, Jesus. Where is the kingdom of God? Are you going to get to it?"

So John actually sends a couple of his disciples to Jesus to ask him the question directly. "Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?" For a long time I think I've brushed that question off. "Of course he's the one, John. You know that. We all know that." But do we?

Do you ever find yourself asking questions like John? Are you in a place in life where the kingdom is hard to see? Are you feeling let down by Jesus-- or at least disappointed? Do you stare at Jesus like I stared at my new ham radio, asking "Is it even working?"

Are you saying to yourself, “maybe I’ve tasted that hope and peace and joy that comes from the Holy Spirit at some point, but I certainly don’t have it now.” “Enough talk, God... I want some action.”

But listen to what Jesus says: “Go, report to John what you hear and see. Those who were blind are able to see. Those who were crippled are walking. People with skin diseases are cleansed. Those who were deaf now hear. Those who were dead are raised up. The poor have good news proclaimed to them.”

Again, one of the difficulties of hanging around church a lot is that we tend to tune out when we hear lists like this. They sound so familiar. But here’s the thing, it would have sounded familiar to all of those around Jesus as well, because it’s because it’s straight out of Isaiah. We see it in lots of different places, but especially in where we read today in chapter 35. It told us how God would come and

“Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
and the ears of the deaf unstopped;
then the lame shall leap like a deer,
and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.”

Jesus responds to John by telling him the fullness of the salvation that he is bringing. It touches every area of life. It’s overcoming disabilities. It’s addressing sickness. It’s good news, bringing hope, peace, and joy to the poor. It even overcomes death itself. Yes, John, I recognize that this might not be the fire of revolution that you and so many were looking for. But it is salvation nevertheless. It’s a deep, comprehensive healing, which exactly what the kingdom of God is all about.

To some extent Jesus is simply reviewing what's going on. He says, "John, you got arrested all the way back in chapter 4, and now we're at chapter 11. Like you said, you're in prison, so you've missed a few things. The blind receiving sight, that was chapter 9. The crippled walking... that was also chapter 9. Healing leprosy, well, that's in chapter 8. Having a deaf person hear: chapter 9. Raising the dead: chapter 9 again. And way back in chapter 5 I brought good news to the poor when I stood up on the mountain and said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom." It's as if Jesus is saying, "John, I know that these might sound like I'm just quoting scripture at you, but this is stuff that's actually happening! God is saying "yes" to all of the promises of scripture through me." This isn't a let-down. It's exactly what was promised.

It might not be the scope that you were looking for, but the reality seems to be that "God never does anything in a big way that God doesn't first do in a small way."¹

I think that all Christians, at some point in life, have a season like John was having. This is how it can be for us who give our hearts to Jesus. Love is risky, because we don't get let down if we don't love. But if John the Baptist was second-guessing if Jesus was the one, well that's encouraging, isn't it?

I really just have a few things to say about this. First, I think it's important to recognize that Christian after Christian has gone through seasons of life where doubt was their primary outlook on faith. And time and time again, they emerge with renewed vigor and a deeper

¹ Attributed to Dennis Kinlaw.

intellectual or experiential understanding of the faith that they confess. So while I don't think that seasons of doubt are necessarily a *good* thing, I do know that in all things God *works for good*.

Sometimes we need to be reminded of the basics: Whatever you're going through right now, please know that God loves you and that God has never stopped loving you. Just because you don't see it right now doesn't mean that God isn't working for good to come out of the bad.

I think that when we find ourselves in seasons of doubt, the best thing that we can do is to follow John's example: we bring it to Jesus. We bring it to Jesus, and then we wait and listen for the response. It only took John one petition to Jesus to get a response. But as we've talked about a lot recently, if the answer to prayer doesn't show up immediately, we persist in our prayers. We give God no rest about it.

Like John we might be in the prison of our circumstances, but we can still stay connected to Jesus. At the very least, we can do it like John did: through other believers. This is why I tell everyone who goes off to college that it's essential to connect with a Christian group on campus. This is why we need to keep coming to church when times get tough. There is no better place to wrestle with the struggles of life and to work through our doubts than in the presence of other believers.

John missed out on a lot because he was in jail. But Jesus says to him, in effect, "if you could only have the eyes to see and the ears to hear, you would see the signs of the kingdom of God in what you're hearing about me. It might not be what you expected, but blessed is the one who doesn't take offense at me"

Because here is the truth: it's working. My ham radio was working, but I didn't get a response because somehow the conditions weren't right. Jesus is working. And Jesus is doing what Jesus is supposed to be doing. Do you have the eyes to see it? We've seen strangers come into our midst and find faith. We've seen relationships healed. We've seen people turning from their substance dependencies. We've seen people get fed and clothed. We've seen hearts transformed by the power of God's love. Yes we've seen people die, but it's been in a way that fills us with gratitude and praise of God for their lives. We're beginning to see people labor in prayer for God's kingdom to come in their lives. Perhaps it's not the scale or the scope that we deeply long for, but "God never does anything in a big way that God doesn't first do in a small way."

Have you seen it working? Have you seen God's "yes" to the promises of scripture being fulfilled by Jesus in others or in yourself. If you can then go tell others. Go tells others what you've seen and heard. Tell them what you've witnessed with your own eyes. Let's tell the John's among us that their labor is not in vain. Let's help them to realize that they haven't gotten it wrong. Let's recognize the pain that people are in while also pointing them beyond their immediate circumstances to the encouragement of God's work in our midst. That's where the joy is. That's where the peace is. It's working. God is saying "yes."