

**The Rev. Dr. Mary Barber**  
**12.14.25 - Advent 3**

Go and tell John what you hear and see, says Jesus in today's Gospel.

Last week we heard about John in the wilderness baptizing people and calling them to repentance. This week he's in prison, put there by Herod.

John asks his followers to ask Jesus, Are you the one? Now, it seems like John should know the answer to that question, since just last week we heard him talk about the one coming after him, as if he knew who that would be. And we know that Jesus came to John for baptism and the skies opened up and the Holy Spirit called out. But a lot has happened since then, and it is understandable that John might want some reassurance, given his situation. It's understandable that his hope might be a bit fragile as he sits in prison awaiting his fate.

Are you the one? John's followers ask Jesus. Jesus doesn't answer directly. He answers in coded speech, using references he knows his listeners will understand.

Why doesn't Jesus just say to John's followers, Yes, I am the one. I am the Messiah? Maybe he realizes the messengers will bring back the message to John, sitting in Herod's prison, no doubt with guards and spies all around, waiting to hear what will be said. If he were to send back the message, I am the Messiah, Herod's soldiers would head straight for him to arrest him for heresy.

So instead he says, Go and tell John, and he makes reference to lines from the prophet Isaiah, that we just heard today. Isaiah is talking about how God's justice will come when God acts, talking about what the kingdom of God will look like. Jesus is strongly implying that he is the one who will bring that justice, who will announce that kingdom.

Go and tell John, Jesus says. And then he adds, Who did you go to the wilderness to see? Someone in soft robes? A reed swaying in the wind?

His listeners would have understood what he was talking about here too. Herod, the Jewish leader appointed by the Roman emperor to rule over Galilee, lived in a palace in Tiberius and wore soft robes. The coins of the region bore his symbol, a reed swaying in the wind.

In case you thought Jesus didn't get political!

Jesus is giving a thinly-veiled criticism of the Jewish leader who is completely allied with Rome, contrasting the corrupt Herod with the ascetic man telling uncomfortable truths and inviting people into baptism, Jesus' fellow prophet John.

Go and tell John. In this third week of Advent we are invited to find a bit of joy in the midst of our preparation for Christ's birth, to find a bit of joy in the midst of taking an honest inventory of ourselves and getting ready.

We get that joy in Isaiah's beautiful, soaring vision of God's dream. We get that joy in Mary's song, the Magnificat, meaning magnify. My soul magnifies the Lord, Mary sings when she visits her relative Elizabeth and Elizabeth affirms her miraculous pregnancy. My soul magnifies God, she sings, and then she sings prophesy, prophecy about God's dream.

God has cast the mighty from their thrones, and has lifted up the lowly, Mary sings.

Go and tell John, Mary's son would say years later.

Mary's song and Jesus' message are messages of joy. Joy, that the kingdom has arrived.

Go and tell John. Now in these times there are quite a few people who could use a message of hope, a message of liberation, a message of joy.

There are people suffering in many ways. From illness, from grief, from the strain and stress of caregiving. There are people worried about health insurance, worried about food benefits. Worried about whether we can afford Christmas this year. And, another shooting.

And like John the Baptist, there are people in prison right now. Or people in what might as well be prison, immigrant detention. People being held with no clear charges, people taken from their jobs and homes, snatched from their regular lives.

Many of us could use some hope, some liberation, some joy right now.

And this week we did get some joyful news, some deeply heartening news.

Venezuelan opposition leader Maria Corina Machado received the Nobel Peace Prize this week. She was awarded the prize for her nearly thirty years of work opposing authoritarian regimes.

Because she has been in hiding for over a year, Maria Corina Machado's daughter read her acceptance speech in Norway at the ceremony. In it, Machado spoke of Venezuela's Spanish, Indigenous and African roots, its long history of democratic values, its history of welcoming migrants and refugees. She spoke of the people's struggles after Venezuela's slow descent into corruption and authoritarianism. And she spoke of hope, of the power of people coming together to take back their country. People who the regime had tried to divide against each other, but who were waking up and realizing that those divisions were a lie.

Maria Corina Machado's words speak to us in our context. She said in her speech, "Even the strongest democracy weakens when its citizens forget that freedom is not something we wait for, but something we become."

She said, "Freedom is a choice that must be renewed each day, measured by our willingness and our courage to defend it."

She then dedicated the Nobel prize to those still suffering, to her fellow activists, to people all around the world who might need to hear her prophetic words.

Go and tell John.

St Martin's, we are not Jesus. We are not John the Baptist. Most of us have not put our lives on the line for decades fighting two different authoritarian administrations. But we can all be bearers of good news, we can all bring the Gospel to people who are suffering and oppressed.

Go and tell John. We can help feed our neighbors, as Jason and Mark and the St Martin's team do one Saturday each month. We can break bread and worship with immigrants and nuns, as Jeff and Lorie and Sandy and I did this past week.

Go and tell John. We can take time for prayer and reflection together, as Joanne is doing with the Advent writing group, as the Companions of the Holy Cross did in a quiet day this weekend.

Go and tell John. We can bring the good news through our ministry in our paid or volunteer work out in the world. We can help bring hope, we can help make God's dream visible.

Go and tell John. God has cast down the mighty from their thrones, and God has lifted up the lowly. Now go, St Martin's, and help make it so. Amen.