

Now when Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and proclaim his message in their cities.

Messengers from John the Baptist

When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, 'Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?' Jesus answered them, 'Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offence at me.'

Jesus Praises John the Baptist

As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: 'What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? What then did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces. What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written,

"See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way before you."

Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John came; and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come. Let anyone with ears listen!

'But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the market-places and calling to one another,

"We played the flute for you, and you did not dance;

we wailed, and you did not mourn.”

For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, “He has a demon”; the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, “Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax-collectors and sinners!” Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.’

Jesus Thanks His Father

At that time Jesus said, ‘I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

‘Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.’

When President John F Kennedy was assassinated, journalist Mary McGrory reportedly said about our country, “ we will never laugh again.” And Senator Patrick Moynihan replied, no, we will laugh again. But we will never be young again.”

All the heaviness of national mourning seemed to hang in that exchange, and it’s a heaviness we recognize now – and a heaviness I feel in this moment of the Gospel of Matthew

That sense of world weary doubt rests over the beginning of this moment in Matthew, when the disciples have returned from some of their first forays into declaring the kingdom of God in villages of Galilee, and have found that not everyone is receptive to the message. And John the Baptist, Jesus’ forerunner, has landed in prison. It’s one of the most poignant moments of all Scripture, I think, as John sends word to Jesus at this moment with this simple question – are you the one? Or are we to wait for another?

There’s so much packed into that. Are you the one? Have I been wrong all this time? Have I given my life pointing to a messiah who is not yet really the messiah? Will I ever see the redemption we’ve been promised?

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Jesus recognizes in John's question the frustration of someone who has not seen the fruits of their labors. He knows it himself – as he imagines the people of Israel like a Goldilocks looking for their just right prophet – John with his camels hair and fiery preaching – too severe. Jesus, with his eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners – too soft. The people are holding out for a prophet who is just right.

It seems that even with all the law and the prophets before them, the people are not very good judges of what the kingdom of God looks like. Wisdom seems elusive.

Wisdom is one of those terms we usually associate with the old, with those who have much experience and are not easily swayed by this or that trend. But again and again Jesus seems to turn over what Paul calls the wisdom of the wise, the intelligence of the powerful and well-prepared.

In fact, instead of suggesting that God's wisdom is old and mighty and powerful in the top-down ways we usually imagine, Jesus does the opposite, he starts talking about children's games and infants.

Brain scientists have recently found that Jesus' words about some things being hidden from "the wise and intelligent" may actually be backed up by research. Doing scans of how people operate in groups, they find that the more status and power someone has in a group, the less their brains actually take in all the information available to them. The social intelligence of the most powerful CEO's, these studies found, is actually reduced over time, because power in our culture minimizes relationship. We imagine that the strong and the mighty know but, but these studies show the opposite. Unless they deliberately seek out the advice of their underlings, who are still in relationships with a wider network of people, those who have the most wealth and power are often the least wise.

You have hidden these things from the intelligent and the wise, Jesus says and given them to infants.

Jesus compares the coming of the kingdom to children inviting one another to a game, and God's revelation that comes to infants – infants.

And what do infants know, really? Those same brain scientists will tell you that it takes a matter of years for infants to develop a sense of themselves as separate beings from their parents. For them, being is relationship. Life is being with.

Not everyone has the kind of relationship with their parent that Jesus describes, but maybe you have some memory of it.

A mother I know wrote recently that she has been startled by the contentment she feels holding her third child. “I could snuggle forever like this,” she says, startled that she is so completely content to just be in this relationship.

I wonder if you can remember that sense of utter belonging as a child. Not everyone is fortunate to have such a memory but if you do, it’s worth recalling. For me it goes back to a moment on a sunny porch with my father’s father, sitting in my grandfather’s lap in a moment that was certainly less than a morning but that felt eternal.

What if this infant-like belonging is actually the relationship at the heart of the universe? What if being young is not about being brash and powerful and idealistic but about being small, and dependent, and utterly open to the world.

As Jesus prays to his Father he invites us into this very kind of child-like relationship – revealed to infants.

“you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father;

In Jesus’ relationship with his father, we see that the force at the heart of the world isn’t independence and strength and all-knowing power that holds itself separate from us, but a relationship of utter trust and belonging.

How do we enter into that relationship? Jesus promises that it is not hard, though it might look that way. It requires setting down our heavy burdens of having to be right and picking up a yoke that turns out to be surprisingly easy, because it is Jesus’ yoke.

I think it looks something like this, like returning over and over again to the promise we receive at baptism, a promise that was never about what we understand and always about God’s unleashing new life into the world.

This is the only evidence Jesus says he has for who he is – how this wisdom of relationship plays out in the world

Go and tell John what you see, Jesus says:

The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them.

This week as we met to talk about the work of the Spirit in the book of Acts, I asked people to name the “saints around the edges” in our lives, and sort of expected people to name Sunday School teachers of the past or prophets in the news. But no, you named the

ministry here right here, right now, in this community, in the people you are in relationship with. It was like your own response to a world-weary John:

Prayer shawls knitted, masks sewn, kitchens cleaned, video files uploaded, notes written, phone calls made, babies celebrated, loved ones remembered, yard signs ordered, legislators called, book groups convened, walls painted, gardens weeded, hearing loops installed, meals delivered, gifts gathered and sent to the world

What we see in the kingdom of God is a world made young again by this promise, that a new creation is dawning, that new life is always beginning again, that sight and hearing and healing and power and good news are at the heart of the world in this unshakeable relationship through Jesus Christ.

That utter trust, utter security, utter belonging between a babe and its mother, in a parent rejoicing in their child? That is the power of the universe. That is wisdom. That is the freedom of Christianity. That is what Jesus promises, this day and every day.