

Are you the one?

We have just gone through a grueling election, now followed by shock, despair, joy and questions.



Michael Olmsted

What next? Will this change produce positive solutions for rank and file people, world tensions and the future? What about all those campaign promises and threats?

We are not unlike John the Baptizer as he faces a new day, not from a position of freedom and influence, but from Herod Antipas' prison. Herod Antipas had visited his brother in Rome, and, while there, had seduced his brother's wife. The Herods, since their powerful father's Roman support as "king of the Jews," were undisputed rulers. Herod returned home, divorced his wife and married his brother's wife. Matthew 14:1-12 recounts John's bold condemnation of Herod, the resulting imprisonment of John, and his beheading at the request of Herod's wife, Herodias.

Consider that John had spent his entire life in the Dead Sea wilderness, preaching to great crowds under the blue sky, announcing the coming of God's promised Messiah. Now he is locked away in darkness, silenced by an immoral ruler and wondering if he had made a mistake about Jesus' identity. Did he presume Jesus would rail against sin and sinners, announce God's coming judgment, dismantle the corrupt priesthood of Jerusalem and lead a war against Rome? As Messiah, why had Jesus not delivered John from Herod's wrath? So John sends his disciples to ask Jesus, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?" (v. 3).

Have you ever found yourself in the darkness of despair, struggling with bitter disappointment or devastated by the death of someone dear to you, and wondering where God is and why he allowed your circumstances? Jesus' answer to John remains the answer today for us all.

Tragedy, injustice and circumstances do not define who God is or prevent

his ultimate purpose. We want answers that are easy and even self-evident, but God is not defined by what we think we know, by our expectations or by our demands. Jesus' answer to John focused on the world they shared in that moment, because we can only begin to understand God's ultimate purpose as it unfolds in this world. Jesus urged John to step back from any personal expectation and see what God was doing through his Son. What was the testimony of Jesus' ministry? The blind received their sight, the crippled walked, lepers were cleansed, the deaf heard for themselves God's love, and the marginalized common people found hope and new life in this humble Galilean teacher.

The Jews had been looking for Messiah for generations. They had known slavery in Egypt, exile to Babylon and domination by surrounding nations. They were looking for a king, much like their revered David and Solomon, a king who would lead a great army, subdue the world and lift them to greatness as God's chosen people. Can you blame them? But Jesus is so much more than an instrument of revenge or champion of privilege. He is God's answer to the deepest longing of the human heart, the only one who can restore our brokenness to the image of God.

Matthew 11-12 marks a critical turning for this gospel narrative. Jesus has already been called "Son of David" (1:1; 9:27) and has referred to himself as the "Human One" or "Son of Man" (8:20). It is only after Jesus' disciples enter into a discussion about who people are saying Jesus is that Simon Peter makes the definitive statement: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (16:16). This statement comes after Jesus' disciples have witnessed such miracles as the feeding of the 5,000, the storm on Galilee when Jesus walked on the waves and calmed the storm, and the healing of the Canaanite woman's daughter. We tend to see the conclusion of the gospels with the death and resurrection of Jesus, but the words and actions of

Formations

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Scripture: Matthew 11:2-11

Jesus leading up to the cross reveal the fullest meaning of God's love and grace. The resurrection is the ultimate proof.

Faith in God, salvation, has everything to do with relationship. You become a child of God by accepting his Son and then following him in your thinking, living and relationships.

When John's disciples leave to report Jesus' answer, Jesus turns to the crowd and asks what they went out in the wilderness to see and hear? Were they expecting a celebrity figure in fancy clothes? They had plenty of those in Jerusalem! Were they looking for a fiery prophet? John was more than that! Jesus said John is so much more than any other prophet, as great as they may be, because John the Baptizer is described in Malachi 3:1: "Look, I am sending my messenger before you, who will prepare your way before you." Jesus went on to celebrate John: "I assure you that no one who has ever been born is greater than John the Baptizer." Jesus is not talking about some value ranking in heaven, but the privilege of announcing the arrival of Messiah: "Yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he" (11:11).

As we approach the birthday of Jesus in our world, what is there about his coming to be with us, his actions and teaching, that helps you believe and trust him as your Savior? Who would ever think a peasant baby in a Bethlehem barn or a man crucified between two thieves outside Jerusalem could be God's ultimate answer to our spiritual needs? To witness how he loved people, his refusal to be imprisoned in a religious system, his steadfastness against every instrument of evil including the rejection of those he loves shows that Jesus is the "One"!

Retired after more than 45 years in pastoral ministry, Michael K. Olmsted enjoys family, supply preaching and interim work, literature, history, the arts and antiques.