

How to Recognize the Messiah

Matthew 11:2-15

The Second Sunday in Advent, December 11, 2016

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

The Messiah is hard to recognize.

Even when the prophets predict what He will be like, He is hard to recognize.

It is our human blindness. Our God comes to us and stands before us and we cannot see Him.

Even when we know the right answer, it is hard to say. Even when we know that the Messiah is stronger than Superman, it is hard to admit it.

I once asked the congregation if you folks could spot the Christ figure in the Disney movie *Frozen*. For those of you who do not know, a number of years ago Disney made an animated feature entitled *Frozen*. It is the account of two royal sisters one of whom has the supernatural ability to manipulate ice. Her name is Elsa. Her younger sister is Anna. There is a character in the film that resembles the Messiah very closely. When I asked the congregation to identify the Christ figure in the movie you had trouble doing so. Some of you have not seen the film and so I excuse all of you. But some of you had watched the film over and over and over again and still did not figure out who the Christ figure was. Most people guessed that it was Elsa. Why did you guess that it was Elsa? Was it because she is the one with the supernatural powers? Is it because she could do wonderful things with snow and ice? She could create an ice castle and create a snow monster and make a snowman that talks with a quirky sense of humor. We see the wonderful things that she can do and we are enamored by them. But Elsa is not the Christ figure. Anna is. She is the one who dies and rises again. She dies saving her sister in an act of love and self sacrifice. In her death she destroys the weapon of the enemy which sought to destroy her sister. Then after she dies she rises again because of her act of love and devotion toward her sister. That should leap off the screen and shout "Jesus" to us. And so I ask you, when you took your children to see the film, did it shout "Jesus" to you? And if it did not, why didn't it? Could it be that even we who believe in Jesus and attend His Divine Service do not recognize Him when we see Him? Could it be that if we had lived thousands of years ago when He was incarnate among us, that we would have missed Him also.

John the Baptist did not see the Messiah. John the Baptist baptized Him. John the Baptist was there when the voice came from heaven and said that Jesus was the beloved Son of the Father. John the Baptist had heard that Jesus was doing wonderful and marvelous things. Now you would think that giving sight to the blind and making the lame walk and purifying lepers and raising the dead would be signs enough that this is your Messiah. But it wasn't. John knew that the prophets had predicted that the Messiah would do those things, but he also knew that the prophets had predicted that the Messiah would set the prisoners free. John was in prison. Why had his Messiah not yet set him free?

The Messiah does His job the way that the Messiah does His job. It is not our place to question why or how. If Jesus had not set John free from prisoner it was not because He was not going to. He simply had not done it yet. There were many lepers and lame and blind and dead whom the Lord did not heal, but that does not mean that He will not.

And maybe that is what makes the Messiah hard to recognize. He does things in His own time and on His own terms. He does them, but He does them the way that He does them.

We are like the generation of our Lord's day. He compared them to children in the marketplace. We played a flute for you and you did not dance. We sang a dirge and you did not weep. What He means by that is that a certain input was given the correct response was not forthcoming. When a person plays a

flute the children should dance, but they did not. When a person sings a dirge the children should mourn, but they did not. They do not know what to do with the input that is given to them. The Messiah is doing what the Messiah does and they do not know what to do with what He is doing and so they do not recognize Him.

And are we any different?

Why aren't any of our superheroes more like Jesus? Why don't we have more of them healing and raising the dead? Are we so obsessed with death and destruction that we are not satisfied with the workings of the Messiah? We, like the Pharisees, would have liked to have seen a sign from heaven performed by Jesus.

And so the prophets help us out. They say that Elijah will come before the Messiah. That way when Elijah comes we will know that Messiah is right around the corner. But then Elijah came and we did not see him either.

When Malachi predicts that Elijah will come before the Messiah, he is predicting that a dead man will come before the Messiah. When a dead man comes you expect something supernatural. You do not expect another person to be the replacement of the dead man.

When John wears camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist, no one said, "Oh look. There's Elijah." When people read the accounts of John the Baptist only those who have been previously instructed by the Lord recognize him to be Elijah. Otherwise even we would not know that he was the Elijah who was to come.

And perhaps that is why Jesus says it so plainly. He simply says that John the Baptist was the Elijah was predicted by the prophets to come before the Messiah. That way you would recognize who John is and also you would recognize the Messiah who comes after him.

He who has ears to hear, let him hear.