

## ***Based on Matthew 11:2-11***

### ***Third Sunday of Advent***

*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 offense at me."*

*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."*

**Matthew 11:2-11**

John the Baptist was the one who had baptized Jesus, anointing him really, as the embodiment of the hopes of Israel. John had seen the descent of the Holy Spirit on Jesus, John tells the crowds that Jesus is the one that the prophet Isaiah had seen, and according to Luke, John was the cousin of Jesus and would surely have heard the stories of Gabriel and his mother's visit with Mary, the mother of Jesus. Yet, despite all of that, as John sits in prison, he begins to doubt the reality of what he has witnessed and believed.

Lots of people think that having faith means never having to entertain any doubts. But I think that's not how it works for most people. I might even go a little further to say that faith and doubt are two sides of the same coin; that they are interrelated. In the letter to the Hebrews, the author writes, "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." We don't need faith for things that we can see are true; we don't need faith to understand that the sun will rise on the eastern horizon tomorrow.

No, faith is the gift we need to spark the power of divine hope which rests in each of us. The Spirit of God moves and acts in unexpected ways and enters into our lives from unexpected places. It is mysterious and difficult to comprehend, defying easy

understanding. And yet, many of us, all of us probably, have encountered the mysterious works of the Spirit at some point in our lives. We have had that experience that just can't be explained, that miracle, whether large or small that fans the flames of hope, love, and thankfulness within us.

But though faith is a gift of the Spirit, we get to choose whether or not we nurture it and allow it to grow within us. For many, their faiths become brittle because they seek to hang it on human certainties and when the doubts which necessarily arise to challenge their false certainties become too much to bear, their faith breaks and shatters.

When we nurture our faith through the disciplines shown us by Jesus; worship, prayer, service, study, sabbath, and generosity, our faith grows not because we have banished the doubts and mysteries, but because we have come to understand that they are not threats to us. That our faith rests not in false assurances but instead on the steadfastness of God's love.