

A Politically Correct Christmas Greeting: “Best wishes for an environmentally conscious, socially responsible, low-stress, non-addictive, gender-neutral, winter solstice holiday, practiced within the most joyous traditions of the religious persuasion of your choice...” Happy Holidays

There was nothing PC about John the Baptist – he called it for what it was. Recall his words from last week’s Gospel: “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath...the chaff will burn with unquenchable fire!”

That was the way it all started, his world alive with certainty and hope, but now he finds himself imprisoned in the dungeon of Herod’s prison-fortress, asking, “Are you the one?”

+An analogy might be a marriage or relationship that started in the same way, but now you might be asking, “Are you the one?” In many facets, we may have asked the same question. If so, give God time.

Yes, John may have begun to doubt Jesus’ identity as the promised Messiah. The silent healing, preaching, saving, and empowering ministry of Jesus was a surprise to John and to those who expected a fire-and-brimstone Messiah.

Nor did Jesus conform to popular Jewish beliefs about a warrior and a political Messiah who would bring political, social, and economic deliverance to Israel. Instead, Jesus pronounced blessings on the poor in spirit, the meek, and peacemakers. He called his disciples to love their enemies. He warned his disciples not to judge others.

For John, these teachings might have seemed to weaken rather than to strengthen the Messiah’s cause. Furthermore, Jesus moved away from Jerusalem, the home of the Temple and the center of religious authority, and began his ministry in Galilee among the common people.

He may have been wondering why the expected Messiah was not setting him free. John may have found sympathetic doubters among his own disciples who might have wondered how the Messiah could leave their own teacher in prison, and how he could usher in the kingdom without political or military might.

+A few years ago in *Reader's Digest* a lady named Barbara Bartocci reported searching for the perfect birthday card for her husband. She came across a promising one.

On the outside it read: "Sweetheart, you're the answer to my prayers." Then she turned to the inside, which was inscribed, "You're not what I prayed for exactly, but apparently you are the answer."

In a strange way, something like that was running through John's mind as he sat there in that prison. He had to work this through, because I doubt this is what he had envisioned as an answer to his prayers.

The important thing is that God did answer his prophecy, just not in the manner/means he expected. John had to work it out, as we do whenever life does not turn out as we expected and our future uncertain.

Jesus' answer to them was to tell John about the healing, the transformation, and the power of the Gospel given to the poor they have seen.

The message Jesus sends to John and to us is that the power of Christ's coming is found not in the sound and fury of battle but in the changes within human hearts and lives.

We see the power of Christ's coming at Christmas most vividly not in the brightness of our lights, the glitter of our decorations, or the number of our gifts, as nice as they are.

The power of Christ's coming is often in subtle ways, opening doors for our hearts. There are some very bad things happening in this world, but beneath it the real miracles of the Messiah occur every day within human hearts.

The inner change that Jesus came to bring about in the human soul is the necessary condition for any abiding change in our world.

\*A compliment instead of critical words may resurrect one's day. A prayer for another might mean changes in the world.

Part of the deep joy of Advent and of Christmas comes from our knowledge that the Messiah came to bring life to the dead places in our heart, to help us recover spiritual vitality in our soul.

Yes, go tell him what you hear and see. Things may not be working out the way he wanted them, but every now and then in surprising places, marvelous things are happening.

The following are real people that I have encountered here and many others beyond this.

+Those once paralyzed over the grief of losing a loved one have found the hand of another who was once crippled in the same way, but now walks again among the Body of Christ.

+Those once dead in addictions have risen to experience freedom and now worship in thanksgiving among us.

+You who were blind to the love have found it in the love of another who has walked into their lives. (I do a lot of weddings!)

+There those among us who were raised once deaf to the gospel now hear it singing in their hearts.

+Those depressed in spirit have found hope and love. These are our witnesses John, those who worship among us.

The Messiah that John awaited did indeed come to do battle not with the Romans but with the power of sin; not on the plains of Palestine but in every human heart; not once but in every generation.