

<sup>2</sup>When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples <sup>3</sup>and said to him, “Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?” <sup>4</sup>Jesus answered them, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: <sup>5</sup>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. <sup>6</sup>And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me.”

<sup>7</sup>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? <sup>8</sup>What then did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces. <sup>9</sup>What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. <sup>10</sup>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.’ <sup>11</sup>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.

Many have wandered away. In this congregation, in many congregations across our land many have wandered away. A lot of sons and daughters, children and grandchildren have drifted away from worshipping the Father, Son and Holy Spirit with other Christians. If I were to ask each of you to raise your hand who has a loved one who is sleeping in this morning, or out for coffee, or reading the paper or watching important people being interviewed on TV most of your hands would be raised. Not many have left because of anger – most simply do not put worship on the top of their list of priorities. No lightning strikes when they miss a Sunday here or there – good things keep on coming to them when they are gone for a month or a year or two. And when they do come back no lightning strikes then either – no sermons grab their hearts and turn them upside down – no hymn fills their heart with hope and courage for a new week. Maybe the loss of a job or a health problem brings them back ready to listen with ears that can hear. Maybe the birth of a child gets them thinking about eternal truth. But many have not come back at all.

Maybe they seek their salvation in what they can possess. Beautiful things, interesting experiences, all the tastes and smells and sensations that can be experienced throughout the world – who needs more than this? Maybe

they tune their heart to hope for their favorite team winning – whether that team is made up of incredible athletes or the children who share their table – that can be quite a high. Or maybe the habits of how they spend their hours – work or TV or reading, or talking or raising kids – maybe these are enough to satisfy whatever longings their hearts know.

How different it would be if for those who worship the promises of the first lesson all happened: the desert blossoming – waters breaking forth in the wilderness – streams in the desert! Weak hands strengthened, feeble knees made firm, the eyes of the blind opened, the ears of the deaf unstopped; the lame leaping like a deer! How different it would be if the Messiah Jesus would bring all the soldiers home from Iraq – close up the unemployment office because there was no need for it, calm all the children and make them loving and obedient, make every husband faithful, happy and considerate, every wife courageous and kind! How different it would be for those who worship if all the world would be changed and life would not be so hard!

Maybe John thought that those sorts of changes were in store for him when he began. He had declared, “After me comes one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire – his winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and will gather the wheat into his granary but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

But time went on and nothing changed. John did exactly what the Lord led him to do and instead of the world being judged and the new day coming John was imprisoned. He heard what Jesus was doing and he sent word asking, “Are you the one who is to come or are we to wait for another?”

Jesus sent back an answer to John, “Blind receive their sight, lame walk, lepers are cleansed, deaf hear, dead are raised, and poor have good news brought to them. Blessed is anyone who takes not offense at me.”

John had heard what Jesus had done – all he had done for blind ones and lame ones and the others. But John was still in prison.

On a Sunday afternoon a couple of years ago I was in Paris, sitting in Notre Dame Cathedral waiting for an organ concert to begin. I thought of the prayers that had come to God from that place. Mothers, fathers, children, wives, and husbands pouring out their hearts to the Almighty God and to Jesus and in that place to Mary, also. The volume and intensity of those prayers was beyond my imagining.

Or think of this space – just forty years old. Think of the prayers and the pleadings that have come from your minds and hearts and mouths and from so many others who sat in these pews and knelt at this altar. Health and courage and safety – forgiveness – hope – faith, jobs and money for mortgages and pleadings for reconciliation. Did deserts blossom? Sometimes. Were weak hands strengthened? Sometimes. The eyes of the blind opened? Sometimes.

But most times nothing out there changed. Children were still rebellious – husbands still unfaithful – pain remained present. But sometimes things in here changed – in your heart. Sometimes a hand was offered to share a journey or to wipe away a tear. Maybe that hand was yours or the one who sits next to you. Sometimes a blind one did begin to see – maybe that blind one was you.

Jesus said, “Blessed is anyone who takes not offense at me.”

Jesus’ ways of bringing us through the wilderness are not always ways we understand or even want. But he wants you and I to trust every day and in every moment in his ways. When you insist on your own way – insist on God doing for you what you think you most need there is danger you will wander away. But Jesus will never let go of you. In knowing that, you will always be blessed.

The day is coming when all will be changed – blind will see, deaf will hear, lame ones will be dancing. Jesus opened that day to you in his dying and rising. Until that day we will cling to Jesus’ story whenever we gather here – From Bethlehem, to Galilee to Jerusalem, to Avon Lake, to the Kingdom of heaven – his story is ours.