

Karen Hollis
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Matthew 11:2-11

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be reflections of your word to us this morning, in Christ Jesus we pray,
Amen.

During my time at Fauntleroy church in Seattle as minister for children and families, it was my job to organize the annual Christmas pageant. I did it 3 years in a row, and when I left there I swore I would never do it again. Don't ask me to do it – it's not my gift. But it wasn't all bad. One of my 4th graders came to me many months before Christmas one year and said, "I have an idea for next year's Christmas pageant . . . it's more of a play." There is a little boy who is really selfish and thinks Christmas is all about how many gifts he gets and how expensive they are – he just wants to get all the things, and never thinks about anyone else. Then a few nights before Christmas eve he goes to sleep, and like in A Christmas Carol, an angel takes him around to different scenes in Jesus' life and they talk about why Christmas is not about this selfish boy, but the birth of Jesus.

Annika is quite a young lady – very bright, creative and confident. She wrote the play with dialogue and scene direction, the whole bit. And it was fantastic. Our music director even wrote original music that the kids performed. It was naturally a hit . . . but the message also sunk in, because she turned Jesus' story on its head. I haven't come through the Jewish tradition, though I am able to connect with their narrative of waiting for a saviour . . . mostly I think many of us are simply living our lives in a beautiful and broken world, looking for hope and meaning. Annika gives a very clear response to reasonable questions, like: *Why do we celebrate Jesus' birth?* And *is Jesus the real thing?*

In the play, the angel takes the boy to see Jesus healing: the scene opens with a blind man sitting next to the road. When he hears that Jesus is there, he shouts, 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!' Jesus stops and says, 'come here,' so he jumps up and comes to Jesus. Jesus says to him, 'What do

you want me to do for you?’ The blind man says, ‘My teacher, let me see again.’ Jesus replies, ‘Go; your faith has made you well.’ Immediately he regains his sight and joins those following Jesus.

Then the angel takes the boy to see Jesus speaking to a crowd. As it gets later in the day the disciples tell Jesus he should let them go so they can get some food to eat, but Jesus replies, “you give them something to eat.” The disciples are flustered – one asserts that they can’t possibly come up with enough food for all those people. Another disciple shows him a boy who has 5 barley loaves and 2 fish. Jesus has everyone sit down, then he takes the loaves, gives thanks and distributes to those who were seated as much as they want, then does the same with the fish. When everyone has eaten their fill, the disciples collect what is left, which fills 12 baskets.

Why *should* I celebrate Jesus’ birth? The angel’s response is: see for yourself who he is. It’s even Jesus’ answer to John the Baptist. When his disciples come asking, Jesus doesn’t criticize or insist he should know better. He simply tells his disciples to go and tell John what they hear and see. He doesn’t ask them to tell John what a great teacher and healer he has become . . . instead, they give him the stories and tell of their experiences. “I saw him heal a blind man on the street. He said, ‘go, your faith has made you well.’” “I saw Jesus bless a few loaves of bread and fish, and give it to a crowd of thousands. There was even food left over.”

John hears the stories and has to do his own work of interpreting them, thinking about what the scriptures say, and reconciling the stories and scriptures with who he imagined the Messiah would be. Jesus asks John to wrestle with it a bit. He’s not going to offer easy answers . . . Jesus doesn’t offer easy answers but invites each of us to do the work of discipleship. Jesus invites each of us to find the truth of God in us. Of course, it’s important to have teachers and community to help us find clarity and insights. But ultimately for John and for us, it’s a personal journey of deepening and clarifying our relationship with God. My childhood pastor used to say, faith is subjecting the parts of us that don’t believe to the parts that do. What is that conversation like between the parts of yourself that don’t believe and those

that do? What are the stories that remind you of who Jesus is to you? Which ones ground you and centre you?

Before the angel takes the boy back to his bed, they stop by the manger scene and it all clicks in for him . . . that man who did all those wondrous things, he's the one born on Christmas? If he did all those things for them, imagine what he could do in my life! And the boy was forever changed.

Thanks be to God!