**Sermon 17th December 2024 - Matthew 11 - Rev Hans Taling**

Some interesting observations in this event when John asks Jesus about looking for another: The Greek clearly means, looking for someone of another kind.

It might even mean something similar to asking someone; are you the right person for the job?

John’s expectation of Jesus’ Messiahship was not wrong but incomplete. John’s focus was on the eschatological belief that God was going to introduce a final judgment and establish a new Jewish Kingdom. See 3:10-12 - I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 12 His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will clear His threshing floor and gather His wheat into the barn, but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire.

For John the Messiah was a Bringer of judgement and a carrier of fire; less Messianic and peaceful, but more cataclysmic and catastrophic.

That is not to say that God is not a God of judgement, but God is even so a God of love. Judgement follows later, but we are now in the time of God’s offer of reconciliation. John the Baptist was focussed on the time of judgement to come and could not see the depth of God’s patience and room for repentance. Both sides of God are to be kept in balance and the one should not prevail over the other.

In the reply on John’s question by Jesus we can find some interesting details of Jesus’ character. And in the character of Jesus we can find glimpses of the character of God. When Jesus said; follow Me, He also means following in His character, so we can find guidelines for our own behaviour when we look to Jesus character.

1. Jesus did not answer John’s doubt with a proper telling off, or condemning him for asking the question. Jesus didn’t say things like; how stupid to ask this question, or how dare you to ask this question. Jesus could have reprimanded John for his lack of faith or understanding, but nothing like that. Instead Jesus says to John; look what you hear and see and discover how the Kingdom of God is at work through what happens.

2. And here’s the 2nd observation of Jesus character. Because Jesus doesn’t say: tell John what **I’m** doing, but ‘tell the things you hear and see’.

Jesus doesn’t point to Himself like a dictator will do to glorify himself, but instead Jesus refers to what is happening through the power of God at work through Him.

Not Jesus puts Himself at the centre, but the Power of God.

It are also the words and works of Jesus that create faith, not only Jesus Himself. As it says in Rom 10:17; So faith comes from hearing the message, and the message that is heard is what Christ spoke.

Faith comes by hearing and hearing comes through the preaching of Jesus Christ.

(and we are His messengers).

3. The last observation is how Jesus praises John the Baptist for what he did. Jesus doesn’t say anything wrong about him, or accuses John that he doesn’t understand the full picture of Jesus’ ministry.

It reminds me of Romans 14:4, where Paul literally says: ‘Who are you to criticize someone else’s servant? The Lord will determine whether his servant has been successful. The servant will be successful because the Lord makes him successful.’

Jesus’ attitude is the prime example of this. Instead of criticising John for what he did not understand or omitted, Jesus praises John for what he has done well.

We live in a time in which much criticism can be heard on many media outlets and the church is not an exception to it. Perhaps all members of all churches should look for another attitude, of another kind, in which criticism is not silenced, but overpowered by thankfulness and praise for what has gone well. In doing so, the members of the church build each other up, instead of breaking one another down. The message of peace on earth as celebrated at Christmas has its heart within the church.