

Are You the One

December 14, 2025

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I had a whole other sermon outlined that I was ready to offer this morning...and then last night there was another shooting

This time at Brown University which hit very close to home for me

I grew up in Attleboro, MA which is on the border of Rhode Island and growing up during Boston's big dig, my friends and I picked Providence as our hang out spot

There was a new mall that had all these cool shops and restaurants, and it wasn't long before we realized how cool Thayer St. was near the Brown campus

After college, many of my friends moved to Providence as a more affordable city than Boston and many of them still live in the area

My best friend was in Providence last night, a mile and a half from the Brown campus celebrating a friend's birthday when the shooting happened and another friend is a news anchor and was on the scene covering the story into the wee hours of the night

It shook me to think of the proximity of my friends to this tragedy, to see the images of streets I know so well swarmed with flashing lights and agents in tactical gear, knowing the ins and outs of the hospital the victims were brought to because it's where I did my chaplaincy training

It wasn't that long ago that we in Maine were the ones sheltering in place and grieving the tragedy in Lewiston

I was going to start my sermon this morning by rereading the Isaiah passage from this morning's lessons and having us visualize the hope and joy it radiates on this *Gaudete*, Rejoice, Sunday in Advent

But, to be honest, I feel more like John the Baptist in his prison cell

I did not need to shelter in place last night, but my heart, my body, my spirit hid, diminished, retreated into a place of sadness and fear

Last week we read about Jesus' cousin, John, who was full of vim and vigor – calling people into the wilderness to repent and be baptized to prepare themselves for receiving the Lord into their lives

Clearly some time has passed between then and our story this morning – John stayed full of vim and vigor and in his passion for the Messiah, his cousin whom he heard named as God's beloved child after he baptized him in the Jordan, was unmistakable – John was not afraid to speak up and speak out to the corruption and injustice he saw because he knew that Jesus had come to change things for the better

And it got him arrested and put in prison and it is from his prison cell that he asks his followers to go to Jesus and ask him “are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?”

You'd think the voice from heaven when Jesus came out of the river after his baptism would have made this very clear, but you have to realize that in John's mind and in the mind of a lot of their comrades during this time, the coming Messiah was going to rock their world

The Messiah was expected to not just ruffle the feathers of the unjust power systems of the day but to topple them, upend them, tear them down

John's perspective on Jesus was certainly hampered by the bars that blocked his view, but John needed reassurance: are you the one?

Are you the one we hoped for? Are you the one who is going to bring the change?

Are you the one?

Karri Alldredge, a New Testament scholar out of Chicago writes: “John’s question—‘Are you the one...?’—resonates in our present time. As ICE raids, detention centers, and mass deportations terrorize communities,” and I would add mass shootings, “many are asking: What is the good news for our times? How is God delivering God’s people in these fear-filled times?”¹

Jesus’ response to John’s question – Are you the one? – is simple: “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.”

“Jesus’ response to John is not a recounting of his identity as the Son of God. Nor is it a theological treatise about his beliefs,” writes Dr. Alldredge. “Instead, Jesus responds by naming his actions and the impacts they have on the community. Through Jesus, community members have gained sight, mobility, hearing, et cetera. These are not just cures to address physical ailments. They are opportunities for healing those who have been ostracized by society as they are reintegrated into the collective.”

Jesus’ response to his beloved, incarcerated cousin is not to puff his chest, stand at a podium and declare “I AM HE!”

Jesus’ response is an invitation to witness to the tangible difference his actions are making in the lives and livelihoods of those he encounters

It’s not about “I am the he” it’s “I do the he” – the kingdom of God is manifesting around me, do you perceive it?

¹ <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/third-sunday-of-advent/commentary-on-matthew-112-11-7>

Dr. Alldredge writes: “Jesus’ response is a call to action. Any who follow Jesus are called to embody the good news as Jesus did, sharing it through actions with those who are most vulnerable. More than offering words and platitudes, people of God are called to embody the good news. It is a call to care for and reintegrate those cast out or overlooked by communities: the forgotten in prisons and detention centers, shelters and hospitals. It asks us to consider how our actions answer the question ‘Are you the one...?’”

Last night as I listened to my friend bring live updates from the streets of Providence my heart was aching to know “are you the one?” – where is the one?

from cells in prisons and detention centers around the nation and as close as the Cumberland County jail in Portland just off Congress St, the vulnerable and the scapegoated are aching to know “are you the one? where is the one?”

Bruce Epperly, a theologian and minister in the UCC, writes in his reflection on this morning’s texts: “Is there any hope for the nation? Can we muster the courage to make good trouble in Jesus’ name and have the patience to face adversity and persecution? Will our efforts make any difference or is our nation and planet beyond the hope of returning to well-being in our lifetime or at all? We are tempted to give up hope, hunker down, and take care of our own circle. Yet, in the quest for a new and healed world, we are the ones we are waiting for, and we are the ones God is waiting for.”²

We are the ones we are waiting for, and we are the ones God is waiting for!

I’m not saying that one of us can, by the flip of the switch, walk out the door right now and somehow end gun violence like that

² <https://processandfaith.org/lectionary-commentary/the-third-sunday-of-advent-december-14-2025/>

I'm not saying that just by deciding we don't like the forced deportations that are happening in our neighborhoods that we can simply say that and somehow fix the broken immigration system in our nation

But I am saying you can do something!

The great Fred Rogers, of Mr. Rogers Neighborhood fame, said in an interview in 1999 that his mother once told him, that when the world feels like it's in chaos and bad things are happening "Look for the helpers. You'll always find people helping."³

We are the ones we are waiting for, and we are the ones God is waiting for!

Be one of the helpers!

Jesus didn't just say he was opposed to people being marginalizing and cast to the shadows, he created paths to reintegrating the left out and the lonely, he practiced radical hospitality

If we're going to wear the badge of "Christian" in our lives, then it better be not just some verbal proclamation but a commitment to being one of the helpers

"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."

"Advent hope inspires and empowers and calls us to be agents of adventure, healing, and creative transformation," Rev. Epperly writes. "We are God's hands, feet, and voice. In this moment, we are called to push forward the moral and spiritual arcs of justice one action at a time. We are called to picket and pray and herald and heal. To be God's companions in healing the world in Jesus' name."

³ <https://www.misterogers.org/videos/look-for-the-helpers/>

You are the ones we're waiting for!

Amen.