

I know that a whole bunch of you were teachers. Good teachers, too, because Church of the Resurrection has a world-class adult education ministry that is chock-full of great classes that you lead. Yup, you're good teachers.

Did you every have a student who you KNEW could already out-teach you? Maybe you were proud of this student, took joy in knowing that you had in some way helped this superstar to grow toward his potential. And maybe you were very glad when he moved on, relieved, even, when he graduated. But maybe you check up on him every once in a while, just to see what he's up to. Or maybe he just has gotten so famous that you hear what your student is doing without even checking.

Sound familiar? There was a young student at the seminary recently who I am sure will be a bishop very soon. Yup, that's my prediction: this person will be a young bishop, and he will be a very good bishop, too. I hear what he's up to every once in a while, always good things, innovative things, pastorally sensitive things. I rejoice for him, most of the time.

Every once in a while I wonder, though. Or maybe I get a bit jealous. A couple of months ago, for instance, there was a video clip of him online. He was slow-dancing with an old woman (one of his parishioners, I thought). They were dancing to “Be my little baby.” What? “Be my little baby????” Is that a wise thing for a young priest to do? I thought about sending him a message, “What's with the ‘Be my little baby’ dance? Didn't you learn anything in seminary about pastoral care? About boundaries?” But I didn't. I thought maybe that was his grandmother with whom he was dancing. I thought maybe they were dancing on their birthdays, which they shared. I thought I had been judgmental. I thought that he knows a lot more than me, pastorally speaking. So I didn't send word to ask him to explain.

I thought of this conversation, though, when I read today's gospel lesson. Here was John the Baptizer, whom we just “met” last Sunday in chapter three of Matthew's gospel when John was drawing big crowds to the desert to be baptized. Now, in chapter eleven, John was in prison. And while in prison John evidently was hearing about Jesus, who people were flocking to hear and to be healed by.

John had baptized Jesus before being arrested. In Matthew's version of the Baptist story, Jesus was baptized by John, then was driven out into the wilderness to be tested, John was arrested, and Jesus “withdrew to Galilee” and moved to Capernaum to live, and then Jesus “began to preach that “the kingdom of heaven has come near.” This was John's message, as we heard last week. And we know that a number of Jesus' inner circle of disciples had been disciples of John the Baptist before following Jesus.

I think Jesus, too, had been one of John’s disciples. And now he not only had surpassed his teacher, he was doing all the things that the prophets of old had said that the Messiah would do: cure the blind, deaf, lame, and mute; and cause all manner of unlikely things to happen. And here’s the important part: Jesus wasn’t the only one fulfilling the old Messianic prophecies. According to chapter ten of Matthew’s gospel, Jesus had given his disciples authority to accomplish the messianic actions in his name, all by themselves. And then Jesus had sent his disciples out into the world to bring the kingdom of heaven even closer to reality in the here and now.

John recognized that the Messianic prophecies seemed to be getting fulfilled by Jesus and Jesus’ disciples. So why did he send word to Jesus to ask, “Are you the one, or are we to wait for another?” The “Be my little baby” dance has helped me this week to understand that there were at least two possibilities that could have caused John to ask this question.

- The first possibility is that John could have thought, Jesus is doing all the right things, all the messianic things, and he’s doing them too well, better than I can. This is my former disciple we’re talking about! In other words, John could have been blinded by a bit of jealousy. (Now don’t tell me that Jesus and John were cousins and that family rivalry was involved. Only Luke, among the gospel writers, knows that the mothers of Jesus and John were sisters.)
- The second possibility is that John could have thought, Jesus is doing either the wrong things to be the Messiah, or Jesus is doing the right things poorly. In other words, John’s action could have included an element of judgment.
 - What wrong things? Perhaps in John’s view the Messiah would come with more emphasis on the vengeance and recompense that Isaiah talked about than on healing and restoring. Maybe John wanted a Messiah to come who would smite the Romans, or at the very least smite the person who was keeping him in prison.
 - What right things done poorly? Perhaps in John’s view the Messiah would accomplish the messianic mission personally rather than sharing it with his disciples.

Whatever the reason for John asking the question, I love Jesus’ answer. Jesus didn’t say, “Yes, I’m the Messiah, the one for whom you wait. There is no other.” At least he didn’t say this directly. Jesus never says things directly. He makes us figure out for ourselves who he is.

So here’s my challenge to you today. Imagine you are the one who John sent to see if Jesus is the Messiah. What would you have to see to believe? What would you have to experience to believe? Would John in his prison listening to you realize that you have seen and felt the presence of God?

Would you tell John that you have been to Church of the Resurrection in search of God? Would you report sitting in the semi-dark in a tired old building with the things we own more than a bit used up? Or would you tell of HOW we have used what we have to help others? Would you report tired old people who are more than a bit used up? Or would you tell about the energy and love that works in and through us, connecting us to God, to each other, and to strangers beyond our walls as we go from this place to embody the kingdom of heaven coming near?

See, here’s what God is saying to us today, “Be my little baby.” And Jesus is saying, “I’m not the ONLY ‘little baby’ in town; I may be the only Messiah, but I also appoint YOU.” And the Holy Spirit is saying, “Dance with us.”



William-Adolphe Bouguereau, *Song of the Angels*, 1881, public domain, WikiArt