



New Year's Message

Whenever, we come to the beginning or end of a calendar year, we often wonder what the future holds...what are the signs to tell us how this new year is going to be for us, our family, our friends, our country? We, including many of our institutions like the government, the media, the economic world, and even the church try to explain the past and predict the future. I'm sure we are already asking ourselves questions as to what this new year holds. Will the stock market be better or worse than last year? Who will become the next President and who hopefully will not? What is going to happen in the Episcopal Church and will there be a solution to the situation? What are the signs of the times and what do they tell us of the future?

In Matthew 11: 2-11, an imprisoned John the Baptist, heard that his cousin, Jesus, was doing some interesting things and wanted to find out whether or not Jesus was truly the Messiah. So, John sends his disciples to ask Jesus: "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" (Mt 11:3). John had been preaching about the One who was to come after him who would baptize with "the Holy Spirit and fire," heal the sick, preach good news to the poor, free the captives and prisoners, and establish God's kingdom on earth.

John's question was filled with hope but at the same time it also possess fear. He was longing for the coming of the Messiah like all the other people and they wanted to put their trust and hope in this Messiah. After all, he was the one who would deliver the nation from Roman oppression. Their expectations were that Jesus would have been a political messiah. However, at the same time, John was unsure as to whether or not Jesus was truly the Messiah or another fore-runner of the Messiah. John, and no doubt the people in general, were trying to discern the signs of the times. Was this the time of the Messiah, which means all will be well for the Jewish nation and the oppression of the Romans would be no more? Was their future going to be brighter and better now that the Messiah had come?

Do we not feel the same way at times like the people back in Jesus' day? The people focused their looking for the signs of the times in a political messiah who would fight for and deliver them from Roman authority so that life would be easier for them. Where or what do we look to when we are trying to determine what the future will be like for us — the stock market, our investments, the economic state of the country, the government? How do we check for the signs of the times? Jesus' preference is to attend to how the blind, lame, deaf, dead, and poor are doing. When they see, walk, hear, rise and receive the good news, the kingdom of God is at hand and the person at whose hands these miracles are happening is the Messiah. By mentioning these signs, Jesus was citing the prophet Isaiah as to what he said the Messiah would do. Furthermore, John would understand when he hears these, for John knew the prophecies and was himself a prophet.

My friends, as we begin a new calendar year and as we sit back and seek to find out what are the signs of the times, whether or not we will experience good or bad times, let us remember that what is of greater importance is God's kingdom here on earth and the continued fulfillment of it. Such fulfillment is seen when the lepers are cleansed, the lame walks, the deaf hears, the blind sees, and the poor receive the good news. Our calling is to participate in the realization of this fulfillment.

Judith and our family join me in wishing you and your family and friends a blessed New Year.

Your Friend and Pastor,

Father Tony