

I want you to listen very carefully to three short stories. And after I tell them, I want you to tell me which one you don't think you would hear at church or in Sunday School. The stories could all sound true, but I want you to think about which you may not hear at church.

First story: There was a seven year old boy who was scared to go to bed in the dark. His parents bought him a night light, but it didn't help for long. He was still scared and kept asking to sleep in his parent's bed. Finally, his parents sat down with him. They asked him if he trusted in God and he said yes. Well they said, you can trust God to be with you in the dark and that God will protect you. It took awhile, but this young man learned to pray to God when he was scared in the dark and he began to trust that God would always protect him. He still uses the night light, but doesn't run to his parents bed anymore when he is scared.

Second story: There was a 10 year old girl who always cared about other people. Her parents said she had been this way since she was much younger. When she heard the stories Jesus told about helping the poor, she was very interested. When she was 10, she decided she had to do something and organized a blanket drive for the homeless in the city near where she lived. She was a little worried about whether anyone would help her, but she knew this was what Jesus taught us to do. She collected 300 blankets and got 14 people to help distribute them (so she and her parents didn't have to do all the work). She is hoping to do even more next year.

Third Story: There was a 12 year old boy who had always loved God. Since he was three or four, he always remembered and understood the bible stories in Sunday School. Adults always were always amazed at how he talked about God. He was the first to offer to pray in a group when asked and was always ready to pray with his friends when they were facing hard times. Then his mother got cancer and was very sick. It was very hard for him. He stopped coming to church and when his friends asked him about God, he said I am not sure that there is a God.

OK full disclosure. I made up the stories, but they are based on stories I have heard. But back to my first question - which story that I told would you be surprised to hear in church? (Hopefully people will chose the third story.)

In church, we tend to tell stories of those who had no faith or who were having a hard time and who through faith in God got better or made a difference. We don't tell stories about those who had great faith and then went backwards. We don't want to hear that and yet that is what we heard in today's gospel with John the Baptist.

John is the faithful guy. The one who had been proclaiming that Jesus was coming – saying that there is one coming who is more powerful than me. John has been proclaiming Jesus before he was born. When Mary came to tell Elizabeth, John's mom,

about Jesus, John leaped in his mother's womb. He baptized Jesus and am sure expected great things of Jesus. But now that John has been put in jail, he is worried. John sends a message to Jesus with his disciples. Are you the one who is to come or is there another?

I don't know what John was expecting of Jesus. Maybe he was not expecting Jesus to be hanging out with the poor and those who the society rejected, teaching and healing. Maybe John was expecting the Messiah he foretold to be all powerful - overthrowing the Romans, and bringing restoration to the oppressed Jewish community.

I find it a blow to hear John was no longer sure of Jesus. has been spent his whole life pointing to the Messiah, his cousin. This was the guy who proclaimed the Messiah in the midst of the wilderness. How could this happen?

But it does at times. Sometimes even the people who really believe in God, have a hard time. God's works differently than we expect. How many times have people said to us, "Well, if God is real, then fill in the blank." or "If God is all powerful why doesn't God stop world hunger, racism, social injustice, global warming?" God does not come down on earth magically making all things that we think should be right right. Instead God calls us to do the hard work of figuring out how to love one another. It is not spectacular although it can be.

I think this is what Jesus does in his response to John. Jesus doesn't get angry with John's questioning. Jesus tells John's disciples – his followers – to go back to John and tell him what you have heard and seen - the blind see, the lame walk, those with leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life, and the Good News is being preached to the poor." Tell John the stories of what is happening. We don't know how John responded to Jesus' message. I hope they helped him know more about what Jesus was about.

When we feel like John and wonder if Jesus is the one – if he is our Savior, I think it will help us to do what Jesus told John to do. Look and see what is actually happening. Look to see what God is doing. Look for the good things - the blessings, the happy times, the joy, the helpers. Don't listen to what others tell you. Look and see! AND see how you can be agents of God's love in this world.

What are some good things you see happening? (ask for responses) Remember the good things. Remember those stories. Remember that God is working always no matter what. Be part of God's work and keep seeing and hearing how Jesus is present right now.