

Meditation Luke 7:19-23

Voice of John the Baptist from prison.

I would have preferred a straight yes. But that wasn't what I got. 'Use your intelligence' that's what he said. Still, it was enough. It meant he was the Messiah, God's special one, sent to heal and free Israel- the one we've waited for, generation after generation. And that vindicates me: my teaching, proclaiming really, that God's Kingdom is close, very close.

Of course, I'm special, too. I'm the answer to my parents' prayers, and a gift from God to Israel, as well: to prepare them for the Kingdom and the Messiah. That's why I've always been so outspoken: I knew I was saying what was true and that God wanted me to say it. And I'm in a lot of trouble because of it. I got away with telling that group of Pharisees they were a brood of vipers, and it felt good, very good. But criticizing Herod to his face is a different matter, and here I am in prison, alone in the dark and the silence, not knowing whether I'll ever get out. That's why I needed to know, you see; I can face things so long as I know I'm right. And now I do; yes, I do.

But the message is a bit of an embarrassment, in another way. 'Blessed is he who takes no offense at me'. Oh, dear, it seems he

knew. He knew that, for me, it's been a bit of a competition. I did it for God, all of it, but I didn't like it when Jesus started getting followers. In my mind was the question 'Does he have more followers than me?'. And even 'is he more special than I am?', 'does he speak God's word better than I do?'

But then, one day when I was baptizing in the river, he came, came to be baptized, himself, and by me. I hadn't seen him for years, and he'd changed. But I knew it was him straight away, and later I knew a lot more. He wasn't like me, a man with a mission to speak God's word and a strong competitive streak; he was someone very different, and I couldn't quite grasp his nature. But it was clear that for him there was no competition: just recognition, acceptance and love. The competition was over for me then; I could never win, and I didn't want to, not the way I did before, at least.

He must have seen it in me for himself, because I've never said a word to a soul. How could I when he's my own family? But all the same, he knew. And he's forgiven me. Forgiven me, when I haven't said a word of apology. Maybe it's part of that nature of his that I can't grasp- the overwhelming forgiveness and acceptance. I feel liberated that he knows and forgives- he even says I'm blessed. Maybe that's the start of his work in freeing and healing Israel.

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