

Two Different Attitudes Second Sunday of Advent/A December 4, 2016 12:30 PM
Is 11:1-10; Rom 15:4-9; **Mt 3:1-12** (Jesus invites us to consider or to reconsider our attitudes toward the world, toward injustice, corruption, and persistent moral weakness, whether we find that in ourselves, in our families, or in society in general.)

“Brood of vipers! Who told you to flee the wrath to come?”

That sounds rather harsh, and that’s because it is. There is a harsh side to the gospel. And yet we see that when Jesus comes he does not have this harshness. John and Jesus were cousins. Their mothers were sisters, or at least relatives, so they came from the same family. But we see that they had a very different take on what is evil, the corruption of the world. **John carried around a lot of anger at the twisted injustice that he found in life**, even in the Jewish society and community. Like many other prophets, but unlike Jesus his cousin, he stressed the coming wrath of God that would avenge the oppressed and set prisoners free. **Jesus on his part had his own way of setting people free, but his view of the heavenly Father had no room for wrath.** One of the great reasons why John has to be remembered is that **we have to see the contrast. John is like the other prophets; Jesus is different.** Jesus’ work of correcting and redeeming is always done out of love for God and for what is good, not anger at sinners or what is bad; there is a difference—there is a difference. In this way **Jesus invites us to consider or to reconsider our attitudes toward the world, toward injustice, corruption, and persistent moral weakness**, whether we find that in ourselves, in our families, or in society in general.

One of the principle features that Jesus introduces in his preaching is including everybody, all men and even women, which at that time was quite unusual—quite unusual. But **Jesus did; he included everybody.** Most prophets addressed the message they had to the leaders. The idea behind that is, look, the leaders decide for everybody. And most people are just followers; they go along, not for Jesus—not for Jesus. **He doesn’t believe the role of everyone is just to follow**, at least **the human leader.** The prophets preached obedience to covenant; **Jesus preached the need for personal transformation for everyone**, which enabled them to enter into a personal relationship with the Father, and that would give them a whole new life, and then they would be obeying not the Law, at least in terms of the written commandments, but rather **they would be obeying the Spirit within**, the Spirit that is the life of the Law, the Spirit that lives in the heart. Prophets regarded the poor and oppressed as victims who needed to be rescued. There’s truth in

this. There's truth in each point of view. But **Jesus regarded anyone ignorant of the Father's love as a victim and in need of redemption and a whole new life**—a very different perspective. As for the consequences of evil in the world, Jesus took those upon himself. **The so-called wrath to come that John refers to, Jesus absorbed willingly so that it wouldn't hurt anyone else.** That's the whole idea of the Cross. So we rightly call **the Cross a redemptive death, a salvific death.** It is a great mystery why this is so, but **it's all tied up in the reality of love, which we barely understand.**

So the attitudes of John and Jesus are very different attitudes. Both have a point. John had a point. Railing at the Pharisees may sound brutal, but he did make a good point; and that is simply this, that **words and signs of new life have to be accompanied by appropriate actions.** “Actions speak louder than words” is the old cliché. But it's not just a cliché; it's true. Actions embody our will in a way words don't. So if we are really serious, then we have to show it by the way we live, by how we choose, how we spend our time and our money. That's all part of our action. And that we can take away today. We can take it home with us for the whole week to think about. **If we want a better, more just world, then our actions have to contribute to a better, more just world.** We can't just wish; we have to choose. Another cliché that has a lot of truth in it: **“We have to become the change we desire.”** And then—then the grace of God will make all things new for us.