



The Archbishop gave the sermon as part of the Church of England's weekly online service. This follows in full...

Matthew 11.2-11

"Are you the one who is to come or are we to wait for another?" John's disciples ask of Jesus.

And Jesus replies, "Go and tell John what you hear and see. The blind receive their sight. The lame walk. Lepers are cleansed. The deaf hear. The dead are raised. And the poor have good news brought to them."

In other words, you can know me, and judge me not by what I say, but by what I do.

Or to borrow an image Jesus often uses in the gospels, "You will know a good tree by the good fruit it produces."

And this criteria for judgement isn't really all that unusual. It's what most of us do most of the time when we judge and evaluate each other. It's actions, not words that matter. In fact, the only person we let off this hook is ourself.

Or as someone put it to me recently, we judge others by their actions, but we judge ourselves by our motives. So, when we say we're going to do something, we do, in most cases, genuinely intend to do it. And even if we fail to do it, or do it badly, we know our motive was good.

But we're not so generous with others. They are judged on results only. And we are not very forgiving.

But how does God judge us?

This is one of the great Advent themes. For Advent is not merely a season for getting ready for Christmas, but one where we prepare ourselves for that awesome day when we meet God face-to-face. One where we are invited to contemplate the big issues and the big challenge of our lives.

John the Baptist comes to prepare the way for Jesus. And Jesus prepares us to meet God. Indeed, in Jesus, we learn what God is like. And, of course, in Jesus, we see someone whose motives and actions are perfectly aligned.

But ours aren't!

Here's the point for today.

We don't always do what we say. We don't always bear good fruit. We fall short of our own standards, let alone God's. And we'd like God to judge us by the good intention of our motives, not the track record of our deeds.

And – very good news! - this is God's way. Our God, the God who is revealed to us in Jesus, is full of mercy and understanding, and reaches out to the penitent of heart.

But we also know that penitence begins with self-examination; an honest recognition that, despite even the purest motive, we do indeed fail and fall short. And because of this - because we always like to paint ourselves in the best light possible - others dwell in darkness. The darkness of our lack of understanding. Or, indeed, all the other horrors of a world where the hungry aren't fed, and where the poor are left behind.

This is a dark time of the year. The nights have really closed in, the days shortened. On what we are calling a blue Advent service, we contemplate

the ways we have fallen short, the challenges we face, the sorrows we carry.

What's required is honesty. Honesty about what happens to our world when we endlessly let ourselves off the hook of our responsibilities to each other. Honesty about ourselves and our need of God's grace, healing and forgiveness.

Such honesty will lead to penitence. And penitence about our own failings will lead to mercy in our dealings with others. I.e., we'll start judging others in the same way we hope to be judged ourselves, recognising that all people are, of course, like us. All in need of God's mercy and grace. All in need of forgiveness. All in need of healing.

Then, the deserts of our hearts shall rejoice and blossom; weak and feeble knees will be made firm; and those who are fearful of heart will find strength, for we will see the God who comes to save, who opens blind eyes, and stops deaf ears, and in particular brings good news to the poorest of the poor, so that even the least in the kingdom end up greater than John the Baptist himself.

**Watch the service on the [Church of England YouTube page](#)**

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