

1. Jesus in the Neighborhood (in our Matthew reading text for the week, 11-14, we find Jesus interacting with all kinds of people—with them for the most part trying to figure out who he really is, from John the Baptist and his disciples to the Pharisees. It was a given that no one could just ignore Jesus—his impact was way too significant for that. He was a rock star of sorts—when he came to the neighborhood everyone knew it. So people were trying to get a handle on him. He fit no stereotype. Were his outrageous claims of being the Messiah true? How could he do such amazing things? He basically defied all logic—a nobody from Nazareth; had no formal rabbi training; yet was incredibly insightful; healed people; was a polarizing figure. What to do—believe him? Follow him? Oppose him? Reveal him as a fraud? Jesus presented quite the conundrum. Looking at it now through the lens of faith we may conclude that it should not have been that difficult. Obviously he was the Son of God. But we all know it is more complicated than that—even now—as pre-conceived notions, entrenched expectations and doubt erode away faith. So we take these neighborhood stories of Jesus and use them to challenge us now to really see the Jesus presented in them—and he well may be not the guy we expect to find. Specifically let's focus in on two texts)
2. Matthew 11:4 (This is the imprisoned John the Baptist sending his disciples to inquire of Jesus if he is the one sent by God—the Messiah. Now whether John himself still had some doubts or he was simply confirming this for his disciples—it doesn't matter. It is the answer that is revealing. Jesus could have self-defined in all kinds of ways, but this is what he chose. I think it speaks an incredible word as to not only who Jesus is, but who he wants us to be)
3. Matthew 12:18-21 (This is actually coming out of Isaiah 42—Jesus fulfilling a prophecy about how he would go about his ministry—not confrontationally but as a bruised reed, but notice the emphasis here on justice—combine that with his answer to John's disciples and you see a picture here of this long overriding motivator of God—justice; doing right by his creation; especially the part of it that is the weakest. **This IS Jesus—making things right;** Between us and God; between us and each other; between God and creation. He made our sin problem right; He made our death problem right. And having done that—he turns to us and says—you go do the same!)
4. Three Takeaways:
 - a. Making things right is God's highest priority (we often get as confused on this as those in Christ's day—which law is the most important; what must I do to be okay with you God—meaning what formula or plan? Repeatedly Jesus counters that thinking—it is not that these are unimportant but he keeps saying things like, before you go to worship, forgive your brother; the greatest thing to do is love God and each other; if you offend the least of these—it is bad news; pure religion is helping the helpless in their distress; Yes it is about justice and mercy, not sacrifice.)
 - b. The way God works is not usually what we expect (again over and over this is born out—it is the woman with the bad rep; the little shepherd boy; the uneducated farmer prophet; the insignificant virgin girl; the rough and tumble fisherman; the persecutor of Christians; the carpenter's son. This is still what we should expect. If you are sitting there thinking—God could never work through someone as unlikely as me—get ready because someone like you is whom he has always worked through. This is what some in our texts were trying to wrap their brain around—you mean this dude from Nazareth? He is it? No way)
 - c. Hope—it is about offering hope (to the nations. Wow, just consider the SOM—so hope filled—the poor are blessed! Hope for things actually being made right—for healing-for reconciliation-for God knowing me and saving me—me, just as I am. What an incredible message)
5. With Him or Not—Matthew 12:30 (don't necessarily mean to continue with the throw down, but I just got to preach the text, right? His justice is marching to victory and he desires us to be a part of that—his making-things-right hands and feet; anticipating to be used to bind up the wounded through his grace, while sharing his message of hope. Levy—let's allow others to really see Jesus in our neighborhood through us. That is being with him.)