I know I was a tiny child when I first heard it, but Advent and Christmas would somehow not be the same if I could not hear and experience the warm carol:

Said the night wind to the little lamb,
Do you hear what I hear?
Way up in the sky, little lamb,
Do you hear what I hear?

The carol continues with all manner of questions about what possibly could be heard in this season of expectation and wonder. It ends, however, with an affirmation about the coming of the Christ child. With broad chords and all voices singing in parts accompanied by strong piano chords: the carol affirms in an explosion of confidence, “He will bring us goodness and light!”
John the Baptist, confined to Herod’s cold and menacing dungeon, tossed there because he dared step on the King’s toes a bit too hard (— and often) — John the Baptist wasn’t sure. Days, weeks, perhaps months had passed since he told the desert crowds about the coming Messiah. Etched in his memory with no small degree of wonder was that moment when he baptized our Lord and witnessed the parting of clouds and the Spirit’s alighting on Jesus’ head.

But where was the promised Kingdom? Why had this One he was so sure was God’s anointed not delivered on all those desert expectations? If Jesus was the coming Messiah, and if the prophets were not just daydreaming – the lame walking, the blind seeing, streams in the desert, God’s presence everywhere in everyone — why was John still in Herod’s grip and, as brutal as it sounds, why would he lose his head to the king’s executioner?

So John sends messengers to Jesus asking the same question any one of us would ask – (and no small number of us are still asking!): “Are
you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?” Jesus quickly owned the question and fired off a response quicker than hitting the “Send” button in an e-mail. “Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offense in me.”

Let me ask you: What do you hear and see? For too many Advent seasons, we have heard this Gospel and made all kinds of explanations as to why blindness and lameness, deafness and death, and the ravages of the poor are not healed, fixed, made right. We wiggle around answers set up with words like, “Well Jesus is not among us anymore.” Or, “those were our Lord’s miracles but in our day such things don’t happen anymore.”

I ask again: What do you hear and see? What evidence are we seeing today – right here – right now – that God’s Kingdom is coming among us? What in God’s name do you hear and see?
Might we see just a smidgen, a wee shred of witness to God’s coming Kingdom in the flickering candles we lit this morning?

Three candles now burn in the Advent wreathe, the third the color pink marking the midpoint in our Advent journey. This third, pink candle (Unfortunately, I didn’t read the same book Deacon Jim did… I can’t follow with the last candles name!) announces the wonder, celebration, and gift of a baby soon to be born. Might the audacious act of lighting these Advent candles tell us that no matter how dark the night may seem, or how brutal the storm may howl, or how empty the loneliness may get, we will ever believe God is bringing light into our troubled and needy world?

Some difficult experiences in life are so opaque, so impossibly painful, that “fixing” it is not even an option.

- No physician in the world is going to “fix” stage 4 cancer.
- No surgeon is going to “fix” a lesion on your pancreas.
• No therapist will ever “fix” the scar tissue in your soul from abuse, over which you had neither control or choice.

So many things that happen to us and in us are not fixable, if “fixing” means the total elimination of the scar (as if it did not happen at all.)

But they can be heal-able. I did not say “cure-able”, but rather “heal-able”. Perhaps grace puddles up in scars. The lighting of a candle in this church (and in your soul or in your home or in this community…) says that no matter how un-fixable or un-curable some things are, healing and hope, wholeness and light can show us the way from our darkness into God’s renewing and coming light. What do you hear and see? I hear the striking of a match and see the dancing of a small flame.

Could it that on this “pink candle Sunday” we might hear and see the witness of grace among us? I suppose that any time is a good time to have grace re-kindled in our lives, but perhaps Advent is the
season of all seasons for such moments. Perhaps those blind to reconciliation might once again see the energy and healing that comes when grace gives us the ability to let go of the grudge or way “goodbye” to the hurt. Maybe right now is a Kingdom-coming moment… cynicism might be transformed into hope. Could it be that God’s Kingdom might surely come in your life and mine if we heard and saw the Gospel changing our attitudes of fear and death into expectations of confidence and life?

34 years ago, on this very day, I stood before the Bishop and was ordained. It was NOT the normal time for ordinations. (I think my mother thought I was crazy for choosing this season, until the very day of her death!) I chose it because I wanted the first homily I preached as a new priest to be about the powerful example of John the Baptist, one who believed, and yet knew he wasn’t the messiah. I chose it because I see the role of every priest (and every Christian!), to live in hope and light as we prepare the way.
What do you hear and see? I want you to believe with me today that the promises of the prophets and the hope of John the Baptist is still very much evident in the work and person of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is not only the *Coming One*, he is the *Present One* through whose grace and love, life, death, and resurrection allows us to finally hear and see who we are and what God so longs to make of us. That is exactly what this season of anticipation and preparation is all about, dear ones. The beautiful decorations, evergreen smells, warm music, and bold pageantry of this holy season are all conspiring to put you and me in a place where we can hear and see ourselves as God sees us: created in God’s image, beloved of God from before the heavens existed, wanted by God now and always as God’s children.

So in these waning moments of Advent with but 10 days until Christmas:

“Do you hear what I hear?”