

January 10, 2021

John the Baptist and Jesus

Acts 9:1-20

On December 11, 2020, the US Food and Drug Administration approved the first COVID-19 vaccine. The approval of a vaccine was a pivotal moment in the pandemic. Days later, a second vaccine was approved for emergency use, and more are on the way. One month after the first vaccine was approved, close to five million Americans have received the first dose.¹ The approval and ensuing distribution of the vaccines are allowing us to finally see the far-off light at the end of this long pandemic tunnel.

In this week's lesson, the student book author reminds us that "there are still thousands of ways in which the world can continue to amaze and astound us, but we need to move out of our comfort zones to let the kingdom of God break in." Without question, the global pandemic has moved us out of our comfort zones and, in doing so, has offered us opportunity after opportunity to be amazed. Parents and teachers have seen the resilience of children who have shifted to new ways of learning. Workers and employers around the globe have proven flexible and nimble as they have implemented technologies that would have seemed impossible only a year ago. Even the vaccines themselves are marvels of human achievement, as the quickest vaccine to have been developed before now took four years.² For those of us who seek to follow Christ, who desire for the kingdom of God to break into our world, the pandemic has also offered entirely new ways for us to show compassion and love to our neighbors.

In today's verses, we see an undercurrent of the Hebrew Scriptures come to light: who *is* the Messiah? What will the Messiah be like? What will the Messiah do? How will we know? These are the unvoiced questions of the Israelites, and when they culminate in John's voiced question through his disciples, we hear the struggle: Jesus, are *you* the one? Jesus's life and ministry challenged the preconceived notions of what God's saving grace would look like. When we allow ourselves—or are forced—to set aside our expectations, we can be amazed at the ways God breaks through. There is no doubt that the global pandemic of 2020 has significantly altered our world, in many ways for the worse, as the loss of life, long-term illness, and altered economic reality will negatively affect us for generations to come. But even in the midst of such devastation and destruction, we have all encountered holy moments that otherwise would never have occurred. And in those moments and more, we've each been given the opportunity to serve as God's agent of grace and peace.

1. Where and how do you see good news in the COVID-19 vaccine?
2. How has the pandemic pushed you out of your comfort zones?
3. Where have you witnessed the kingdom of God during the pandemic?

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¹From [fda.gov/news-events/press-announcements/fda-takes-key-action-fight-against-covid-19-issuing-emergency-use-authorization-first-covid-19](https://www.fda.gov/news-events/press-announcements/fda-takes-key-action-fight-against-covid-19-issuing-emergency-use-authorization-first-covid-19).

²From [biospace.com/article/a-timeline-of-covid-19-vaccine-development/](https://www.biospace.com/article/a-timeline-of-covid-19-vaccine-development/).