

The Third Sunday in Advent (Gaudete)

December 13, 2020

St. Matthew 11:1-11

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

"Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?"

This is what John sends his disciples to ask Jesus. Why would John send his disciples to ask this question? Has he himself become weak in the knees, have the surrounding prison walls caused him to become less of the bold forerunner and a little more of a reed shaking in the wind?

I believe it's natural to ask the question: *did John know who Jesus was? Did he have doubts?* I'm sure he had many doubts throughout his life. But, did he join us in singing the familiar Christmas song, "Mary Did You Know?" That I cannot be convinced of, one could interchange John for Mary, but it would not matter, John knew who Jesus was as much as Mary knew who her Son was to be; why is this?

Well, Mary received the visitation of the angel Gabriel, announcing the miraculous birth to her, instructing her that her Son would be named Jesus, and that He will be the Son of the most High. Due to the reality that Joseph and her had not had sexual relations, she knew and understood that what was occurring was nothing short of a miracle performed by the hand of God. In fact, she goes on to speak and confess what we call the Magnificat (We have sung this lovely canticle every Wednesday evening throughout Advent), *"My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior."* She rejoices in God her Savior! Her joy is located in her child, her Son, whom she proclaims as her Savior.

Well, now John the Baptist is no different; His parents conceived him while advanced in years. Even while in the womb of his mother Elizabeth, the baby John leaps in recognition of whom the child is in Mary's womb. In fact, it would be a little weird if John didn't know who Jesus was, they are relatives after all. Two miraculous births within mere months. But, even more, it is John the Baptist who prepares the way of Jesus, announcing and confessing, *"Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world."* It's John the Baptist who baptizes Jesus and witnesses with his eyes the Spirit of God descend upon Jesus as a dove, and hears with his ears the voice from the heavens declare, *"This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."*

Yet, it is John in Herod's prison, sending his disciples to ask Jesus the question, *"Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?"* Could this be because it is his disciples who have failed to see and hear his words? Are they the ones who are truly poor and imprisoned – imprisoned by their fears and anxieties? I believe so, after all, these disciples of John know what is about to happen to their leader whom they have followed. His life will soon be over.

And so, the disciples go to Jesus as instructed. Isn't it something that the response of Jesus to these disciples of John begins like this, *"Go and tell John the things which you hear and see."* What did they hear and see; *"The blind see and the lame walk; lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear: the dead are raised up and the poor have good news preached to them."* These words echo the prophecy of Isaiah regarding the Christ, yet, now they are no longer mere words, but actual works being fulfilled by Jesus.

But, Jesus does not appear as the disciples of John had imagined or hoped for. He's not dressed in fine clothing, the kind an earthly king would wear. They imagined someone surrounded by good looking folks, healthy people. Instead, they may have been offended to see Jesus hanging out among the poor and downtrodden.

The reality is that Jesus has not fit their mold of what the Savior would look like, He does not come as they had imagined. The truth is, He does not come as you desire Him to come either, He does not appear as you wish, and His Words are met with the deafness of heart. But, He does come as He needs to be. And that does not bring you comfort and joy this Advent. And so, you join in asking, *"Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?"*

As we journey through this life, we are consumed and conditioned that faith comes from within us, especially during this time of year, it even begins at the earliest of ages. Have you ever watched the movie the Polar Express? I don't mind it, it's no National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation, but it has become a favorite of children. Well, if you are not familiar with the movie, there is a boy who is preparing for bed on Christmas Eve, he struggles with believing in, let's say, the Christmas Spirit or Father Christmas. His lack of faith is revealed in greater depth near the end of the movie as there was a big celebration for the arrival of Father Christmas, there were sleigh bells ringing and crowds cheering, yet, the boy could not hear the bells ringing. He was deaf to the sound of the sleigh bells. Why? Because he lacked faith in the world's story of Christmas. Only upon coming to faith in the world's story [Father Christmas] could the young boy finally hear the sound of the bells. The storyline of the movie reveals a belief that the young boy's faith had to begin from within, from inside of him, and it was only assured or sealed by the ringing of the sleigh bells.

Is this not how we begin to become imprisoned in this life? The traps of a faith produced from within oneself, the despair and worry over the depth of one's faith or the fleeting emotions that leave you searching for more, a sign, a seal of God's promise to you. Is this not what we do, even while we have the assurance of Scripture that "[Lord] will never leave us, nor forsake us."

We remain unfulfilled and desire something more! Something a bit more magical, more emotional, more of a feeling. Dear friends, put away all worldly delusions and place your trust in the unfailing Word of God. As we heard from Isaiah today, *"The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever."*

Here is a great joy of being Lutheran, we believe what Scripture teaches, we believe *"faith comes by hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ."* (Romans 10:17) Faith does not begin within you, but enters through your ears. We confess this truth in the meaning of the third article of the Apostles Creed, *"I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith."* Faith is not by your work or reason, but by the work of the Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who comes to you through the Good News of the Gospel.

There is a lot going on in the world, many things cause you to feel like the walls around you are caving in, life is full of doubts and fears. But, as John the Baptist pointed his disciples in their time of great need to Jesus, so he points you today to the very same Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the World. This is what your pastors are called to do as well. When you have doubts, we point you to your Baptism, where the dead are raised to new life in the death and resurrection of Christ. When fear imprisons you, we point you to the Incarnate Word – the Good News preached to the poor, Good News that gives sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf, it is the assurance that God dwells in the midst of you. When nothing in this life quenches your thirst and hunger, we direct you to the Sacrament of the Altar, where the Lamb of God is most tangibly received in the flesh and blood of your Savior. All this should arouse joy within all of us and cause us to say with the introit, *"Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice."*

Today is Gaudete Sunday after all, often highlighted by the fantastic rose candle upon the Advent wreath. Gaudete means to "Rejoice." And this is what I leave with you this day, cause of rejoicing! The joy of knowing your faith resides in Jesus Christ alone. Dear

brothers and sisters, there is no need to look for another, your Savior is near and He is Christ the Lord. +INJ+

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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