

Sermon Advent 3A 2019

December 15, 2019

Matthew 11:2-15

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. This morning we meditate on the Gospel Lesson, previously read.

John The Baptist: the one born of women of whom there is none greater. If you will accept it, Elijah. The Elijah for whom the chair is set. The Elijah from Malachi 4:5, being sent before the great day of the Lord. This is the man who trusts in our Heavenly Father so much that He gives up every claim to earthly wealth, and he goes and preaches in camel's hair and eats of the gourmet menu of locusts and wild honey. He's the John who pulls no punches in His preaching and calls the Pharisees a brood of vipers—something I'm guessing if I did someone would call President Buss in here on me. And if that's not proof enough that this John is no respecter of men, but one trusting in His Heavenly Father, where do we see John today? In jail. For what? For theft? For getting into a fight? For insurrection? Well not in the proper sense. What's John in jail for? For calling out the king and telling him he shouldn't be married to his brother's wife. And that wife apparently had a sensitive conscience because she makes this king arrest John so she doesn't have to hear of her sin. After all, that's what a pricked conscience does it lashes out at the one doing the pricking. But in the end, where is John? In that prison cell. John, steadfast in his confession.

But what do we see here? It seems like there might be some doubt, doesn't it? This great John, not sure if Jesus is really the One to come. This Jesus upon whom John saw the Spirit descend, to whom he heard the Father say, "You are my beloved Son, with You I am well pleased." But as they say in the movies, prison can change a man. Has it? It seems to have made room for this doubt. Now I've heard it said that saying John is doubting isn't the right read on this, but it makes sense that he would doubt doesn't it?

Think about it. What did the Jews think the Messiah was going to do? They thought He was going to show Himself as King of Israel, that He would free Israel from the Romans, that there would be the coming down of this Messianic Kingdom from heaven, and He would reign on earth over the Jews and all the nations. And where is John? Imprisoned by the King of Israel—or the sham of a king that Herod was. The king living under appointment from the tyrannical government. When's this Messiah,

the True King, going to bring the Kingdom and free John? What's taking so long?!!! Is it not even true?!!!

I'm guessing you've endured that wrestling. You've had those dark nights of the soul where things go on around you, and you don't understand why. You have had the times you just question if this is all true. Then there are those times that are truly trying: the times when you truly suffer. You suffer physical pain: your body broken by sin. You suffer emotional pain: the injury someone brings to you when they speak words cutting you down, or making your life hellish. You suffer the pain of loss. And in this midst of this you say, "God is this really what you want for me? Why? What good is this?"

Yes, you know that wrestling. Jesus speaks of violence against the Kingdom in this lesson, and that's what it is, isn't it? Think about it. Luther speaks in the Catechism of the of the coming of the Kingdom of God to mean that work of faith and love. He says that God's Kingdom comes when "our Father in heaven gives us Holy Spirit that we believe His Word and lead godly lives here in time and there in eternity." And think about how this attack against us pushes against that. The devils slithers up to us in those moments and strikes a dagger in our heart in hope that he can bleed that faith out of us; in hope that he can sow the doubt sufficiently that we'll fall into unbelief. He hopes we'll weigh all circumstances and decide it must be more likely that there is no God, that Jesus isn't this Christ to redeem us, that if God is there, He certainly isn't loving, but the kind of God who's hateful and spiteful to His creation. And this doubt works violence.

Or we also see it in how that faith is taught wrongly and corrupted. For example, one that often gets swept under the rug is the teaching of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. The Word of God clearly says what these are: baptism a burial of sin, a cleansing that saves; the Lord's Supper, sure bread and wine, but the very body and blood of Jesus. And yet the violence against the Kingdom corrupts this in so many churches. The value of these great gifts is undermined and they are taught only as symbolic acts that people do to think about God. And yet God promises such great things through them! The consciences of so many suffer violence in being turned from having the comfort God seeks to give them.

I say this having seen so many comforted in trials when I can say: "look here Jesus comes to you. Look Jesus hasn't left you, He made you His own in baptism He

doesn't lie. Look, Jesus promises to be with you to the end of the age, and here He is, giving you the body and blood for forgiveness so you don't have to worry that your suffering is because of some sin." And yet that comfort is robbed from so many. To be clear, I'm not saying anyone who doesn't believe those things is going to hell. I'm just making the point that this is what the devil does. He seeks to rob us of the comfort of the Gospel, of the faith that trusts what God promises. And I think John was knowing this.

But, what's Jesus response? John says, "Should we look for another, or are you the Christ?" And what's Jesus say? "Look John. Look at what you see." He says, **"the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them."** Now as Jesus says this, He's making the point that this is fulfilling what God had promised in the Old Testament. You see Isaiah 33 said these things would happen: **"Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy."** So, the point of what Jesus is saying is this: God is doing just what He said He would do. God is not slow in fulfilling His promises as some understand slowness, with God one thousand years is as a day, and a day a thousand years. God said it would be done and it's being done. I am who I AM, I AM is in the flesh here.

As we say that, whether that's prophecy or not, there's something about the comfort they must have had in witnessing those things. Think about seeing miracles like that. You can see why this would push back doubt!

As you wrestle with it maybe you ask that. Where's the healing?! Where are the dead being raised? Maybe not even miraculously, but why is my recovery taking so long?! Why is my body still broken? Maybe not the dead being raised, but why my loved one? Why my parent? Why my spouse? Why my child? Why?

And faith becomes hard. But Christian, you do see the miraculous. How do you think you're even here? How do you think you see this Jesus and know who He is? How do you think that you know that your Father in Heaven loves you? Because He opened the eyes of your blindness: Cross, resurrection; Baptism, Word, Body and Blood. All these miracles right before your eyes. All of this, Jesus coming to you . All this, the One breaking into the darkness of this world, of your doubt and bringing light: "Christian, here I am. I am with you. I love you with the love that carried your

offense, your rebellion, your death to the cross. Christian, I took that for you, and now because I was forsaken, never will I leave you, never will I forsake you. Christian, you still want to trust in this world, you still want the kingdom of this world, you still want the dead raised and the sight for the blind, and that will come. But Christian it will be far better. Don't think so? Why would I call you in baptism? Why would I speak the absolution to you? Why would I feed you with my body and blood? Yes you see your lowly pastor doing it, but it's actually me. It's me to you. It's me feeding you, me washing you, me speaking the Word to make you whole and to make you holy.

Here I am Christian. I am the One who came, who will come again and bring it all to an end. And I am not slow in fulfilling my promises. And even until then I am with you always. And as great as I told you John was I am far greater.”

And Christian He is. He is and promises to make you so in Him. This isn't by your strength or your doing, only by His. But this is what He does. He gives you His word of comfort, His promises to sustain you. And so He will sustain you.

As we think about John this morning, take comfort then. Take comfort that this one who is greatest among those born of women had his own struggles just like you. And take comfort that the One who pointed John to the promises and reminded him of them does the same to you. He reminds you of His promises: “Never will I leave you, Never will I forsake you, behold I am with you always till the end of the age.” And He even gives you visible elements—bread, wine, water- to make sure you know this is true. And He does this to sustain you in doubt and wrestling, just as He did for John. Thanks be to God. Amen.