

Sermon Advent 3 2018

December 16, 2018

Luke 7:18-28

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. The text for our meditation this morning is the Gospel Lesson previously read, especially these words, **“And John, calling two of his disciples to him, sent them to the Lord, saying, ‘Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?’”**

As John sent his disciples to Jesus he sends them with that question, **“Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?”** In other words, he’s asking, “Are you the Christ, or shall we look for someone else?” Now, some interpret this to mean that John is just continuing to point still to Jesus. Just as he told the people, “behold this is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world,” so also he is pointing these disciples to Jesus saying, “Go look at this man performing these miracles, and know that He’s the Christ.” And as I say that, we can understand that “the One who is to come,” is the Christ. This is an eschatological term; a term describing the One coming to bring the end of the age, the end of the Old Covenant and the beginning of the new age, the Last Days. All that being said, though, there are others who say that this is John doubting. And it would make sense that they’re right.

Yes, John had been the one who had pointed to Jesus, yes John had even baptized Jesus and beheld the Spirit descending on Him like a dove. But where is John now? Where is John when he sends these disciples? Do you remember? He’s been arrested by Herod, and now he’s in prison. You can picture him in prison and waiting for Jesus to do His Messiah thing of setting the captives free. You see, that was a promise. The Messiah would come and He would free people. Jesus even referenced this in Luke four when He steps up to read the lectionary reading for the day and opens it up to Isaiah’s prophecy, **“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”** So there is John, He’s a prisoner, and he’s probably been waiting for the Messiah to come and proclaim liberty to him, set him at liberty as one oppressed. But what has happened? He’s still there. Sure, Herod likes him as a sort of pet, and he probably gets some better treatment than

some prisoners, but he's still in prison. He's still in chains, still probably sleeping on a dirt floor in a cold cell. And Jesus hasn't freed him from it yet.

In that circumstance, you could see why he would start to wonder, couldn't you? You could see him question, "Did I get this wrong?" See him doubting, "Maybe I didn't see what I thought I saw, maybe this isn't the Lamb, the Messiah. Maybe this whole thing is wrong, and I should be looking for someone else." And so he sends his messengers and he doubts.

But what does Jesus do? Does yell and scream about how John shouldn't be doubting, about how ridiculous John is, about how unfaithful he is? No. What does He do? He performs miracles. He heals, He gives sight, He brings back to health. He cleanses the impure. Then He tells those disciples, **"Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is the one who is not offended by me."** "I've healed people, I've helped people walk, look at it. Look at the testimony. It's there."

Now all the more we have to understand that in addition to pointing John to the miracles, He's also pointing John to the Word. You see that phrasing is in relation to the verse I mentioned before. Jesus is saying, "while you're waiting for the freedom of the captives, I'm proclaiming good news to these poor people bound under the tyranny of these afflictions." He's saying "John, it's happening. What you're looking for is going on right here. Just look at the Word and what it promises you. Look at that Word and know that its promises are for you too."

Now, as we hear this, then we have apply this to our own lives. To start we have to acknowledge something. We have to acknowledge that doubt is a sin. How can I say that? Well, think about the commandments, which one would doubt break? You could maybe name a couple, but the most important is the first. Think about it. What is the First Commandment? "You shall have no other gods before me." And what does this mean? "We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things." If we fear God above all things, love Him, and TRUST Him above all things, what is doubting, but trusting something other than God?

Now as I say that, it's easy to respond by saying, "Wow, pastor, that's not fair. Are you saying you don't ever doubt, because I do. Are you saying that's bad?" You might even be think about how doubt has caused you to explore your faith so that you investigated it and it was deepened. Or you might think about how scary it is to be

called a sinner so directly. You might think about how it doesn't make sense to call John a sinner like this. After all, look at what Jesus said about John, "**among those born of women none is greater than John.**" It seems like apart from Jesus, John's the greatest person that ever lived.

That's all so true. But sin is still sin. Just because your sin results in a good thing doesn't prove it wasn't sin, only that God is so good that He'll use even your sin for good. And think about the fact that John being called a doubter is actually comforting. It means that in your doubt you're in good company. In fact, what it shows us is that doubt is an inherent part of our life as sinners. It shows us that ever since the serpent slithered up to Eve and said, "Did God really say?," doubt has been our default—even the default of a man as great as John. In fact, think about how that doubt actually led to sin. The devil tricked Eve into doubting God's love for her, that He wanted the best for her—"You surely won't die, God just wants to hold something back from you; if you eat you'll know more, you'll be like God, you'll know good and evil." Yes, that doubt.

But you see, when we call a spade a spade it's freeing. As hard as it is, when we call ourselves sinners, then we actually have real comfort. Luther said that we so often think of ourselves as painted sinners and Christ a painted savior. That is, we so often think of our sin as not being that bad, and so Christ's work is just kind of a thing that shows us how to live a better, more loving life, so we can know how to try hard enough to overcome our own sin with love. But that's not it. We are real sinners, and Christ is a real Savior. Christ is the Savior who came not for the righteous, but for sinners. And our doubt is a sin. It is just as bad as it sounds, it's just so common we think it can't be. But when we acknowledge it, what a blessing. Christ has come for us. He has come for us with His perfect faith, and He has carried our doubt, carried John's doubt, carried your doubt to His cross that it would be left in His tomb. That's this Christ.

And what then does this Christ do for you in your doubt? Just like He pointed John to the word, He points you to that same word. He tells you, "Are you unsure? Look at my resurrection. Do you have your doubts? Look at where I have been portrayed as crucified before your very eyes, raised for your eternal life." In fact, I have been reading a book lent to me by one of our members called, "Seeking Allah Finding Jesus," about a man named Nabeel Qureshi who was raised Muslim but was converted to faith in Christ. The beginning of his conversion came about because He

found how the resurrection was such a reliable historical fact. That's where Jesus points you, "Look at my resurrection;" the resurrection proclaimed in His Word.

And in addition to that, He tells you, "look at that word that tells you that I have healed those sick and ailing, look at where that word promises that you have freedom. Yes you were captive to death, to sin. You yourself have been captive to the same doubt that the evil one spoke into Eve's ear in paradise. But now you have freedom."

That's what He tells you. And as He speaks to you in that word, look at His love, His gentleness, His heart which is opened wide in His great love for you. That love which caused Him to be born that first Christmas, that love which baptized you into His body, that love which feeds you with the very body born in the manger, crucified for you, raised and ascended. Look at that and calm your fears, relieve your doubts. There is your comfort.

So Christians, as you have your doubts. As you wonder, as you ask with John, "Are you the One who is to come, or shall we look for another?," Jesus comes to you and in His gentleness calms your doubt. He shows you His word and promise to you. He tells you, "do not be afraid, just believe." You and John, so that we may all with John point back to Him and tell the world, "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world, that Lamb born the first Christmas." Amen.