

December 12, 2021  
Third Sunday in Advent

“Now Trusting the Promises”

Luke 7:18-28

People are complex, so you seldom can be sure what’s really going on within a person. Somebody who has suffered the death of a loved, a divorce, a layoff or some such thing may look collected and strong on the outside, but on the inside the pain of loss has devastated them. Sometimes folks who are jokers, the life of the party making everybody laugh, are dreadfully depressed when they’re alone. Sometimes what you see of a person from what they post on social media is an idyllic life when in reality things are a train wreck in the making. People are so complex that even when we examine our own self we can’t make heads or tails of the situation! Only God can truly see someone’s heart.

John the Baptist may have been more complex than most. Ordained by God from conception to be the herald of the Messiah; raised in the Scriptures by a priestly father, filled with the Spirit to proclaim the coming of the kingdom of God in wrath and judgment and yet baptizing those who repented for the forgiving of their sins—then he’s tossed in a dungeon by Herod for proclaiming the truth of Herod’s sin.

Theologians have been at odds with one another about what was going on inside John the Baptist’s head, especially in light of our Gospel reading today. Some argue that because John is who he is, there is no way he can be doubting if Jesus is the Messiah. They say he must have sent these messengers with these questions for the benefit of others to hear God’s answer.

Others think John has lost his faith in Jesus because Jesus hasn’t arrived with the wrath and judgment John proclaimed. Others feel John simply is experiencing doubts because of his own horrible situation in prison. I think Jesus in this situation knows where John is at and tells him what he needs to hear.

*“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.”*

In all that talk about healing Jesus is referring to several parts of Isaiah—He is pointing John to God’s Word, God’s promises. The good news it proclaims about God’s ultimate deliverance. John, having been raised by his pious father Zechariah who was a priest of the temple in Jerusalem, knew the Old Testament and all of God’s promises therein.

And I personally think those last words hit home for John: *“And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.”*

John knows that God’s prophets were rarely received well in the Old Testament. They were maligned, abused and killed. John himself, in a way the last of the Old Testament prophets, was probably rejected himself by the religious ruling class of the day. Herod would have been less likely to arrest and ultimately execute John if the movers and shakers of Jerusalem were favorable toward him. No, those sent by God were often an offense to idolatrous Israel.

John knows this because prophets typically preached wrath and judgment for idolatry and sin, then promised later deliverance by God’s hand. And that’s what I think hit home with John. Jesus was echoing the prophets in not promising present deliverance. Jesus was saying that, yes, He is the Messiah and He will carry out everything God promises; but it will be according to God’s timing and plan, not John’s. Jesus is saying, “Trust God. Trust me. Trust the promises; they are true.”

This speaks right into our complex lives. Same God. Same Jesus. Same promises.

Deep inside, each one of us has our unique challenges, unique losses, unique doubts, struggles and sometimes outright devastations. John had a literal prison. We have circumstances and situations from which we desire to be freed. Some of these struggles may be with the very sins that we know God detests. We want deliverance right now and we struggle to understand why it's not happening.

Well first we need to understand and accept despite our me-centric way of looking at things that God's timing is best. And His promise is that the plan He has underway is more than for our good; it's for our glory.

Zephaniah, the prophet of our reading today, prophesied during the last years of Judah. He proclaimed judgment and destruction upon the people, the city and the temple. The present and immediate future held nothing but challenges, strife and destruction for Israel by God's declaration. But in the end, the end that is our future, the promise of God fulfilled.

*"The LORD has taken away the judgments against you; he has cleared away your enemies. The King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst; you shall never again fear evil. On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: "Fear not, O Zion; let not your hands grow weak. The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing."*

Things will be so good with you that God Himself shall rejoice and exult over you! God is faithful. This promise shall be fulfilled. Wait for it in Christ. *"And blessed is the one who is not offended by me."* Don't get offended by Him. Trust Him.

And the second and maybe more important thing to understand when one wants deliverance right now and one struggles to understand why it's not happening is this: It is happening!

Right now in this proclamation of the Gospel I'm doing this very moment Jesus is announcing the forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with God that places you in that coming reality. The kingdom is your today! Eternal life is yours today!

Has not your past week of life been full of those sins and lack of love for both God and neighbor that warrant God's rejection and condemnation? Have you not been willingly attached to the fallen world that is under God's wrath? We all have. Thus our present reality should rightly be a reality as God's enemy; strangers opposed to Him and His kingdom. Our now should be those walking dead to God.

Yet by virtue of Holy Baptism God has made us today His children! We are this day sons and daughters of the King! Our reality is life in His kingdom. *"And blessed is the one who is not offended by me."*

We are complex people so yeah, to us this whole salvation thing is complicated and difficult and our lives are filled with doubts and struggles. That's on us, and as Paul said, we need to work out our salvation with fear and trembling.

But according to Christ, not so complex. He is the God who came into our humanity, did human life perfect in our place, and took our guilt to His cross and died for all sin. He rose in victory and reigns forever. He has made us righteous, washes us in and feeds us with His forgiveness. He is with us now, is with us through death and into the resurrection to glory. That's who He is today, tomorrow and forever. Especially in the midst of your complex troubles of this life—know this Jesus. *"And blessed is the one who is not offended by me."*

Trust God. Trust Jesus. Trust the promises. They are now and forever true.

Amen.