

December 14, 2025

Third Sunday in Advent

“Sticking with His Plan”

Matthew 11:2-15

In my humble opinion, prison just plain got to John. Some would argue against this. John the Baptist—and just to be clear; John the Baptist is a totally different person than John the apostle who was one of the twelve and wrote a Gospel and epistles in the New Testament—John the Baptist is a prophet to whom God had revealed the truth, that His cousin Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Because of this some would say there is no way that John later, in today's reading, actually doubts that Jesus is the Savior.

I disagree. John has been locked up in Herod's dark, dank fortress dungeon for proclaiming the truth of Herod's sins; maybe locked up for weeks or even months. And mind you, John proclaimed of the coming Messiah, *“He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”*

John was expecting some real action—fire, judgment and power backing up his proclamation about the now-arrived Messiah. What John got was tossed in a dark hole by an adulterous politician. And his cousin, the supposed Messiah, is not taking any action; isn't lifting a finger to spring him out. I believe that John got confused, disheartened and finally believed that something may have gone wrong with the plan. So he sends some of the men who still followed him to Jesus, asking *“Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?”*

I think it important to point out that this is not the question of someone who has lost their faith. The question is aimed at Jesus, the object of John's faith while he is struggling with his earthly situation in faith. But I think John was hoping for an answer like, “Yes, I am the One John, and I'll be busting you out of there in the morning and striking Herod and his cheating wife dead in the process.”

The answer he receives is, *“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. And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.”* Jesus points to how He is fulfilling the prophesied promises of God. Yes, He is the Messiah, and He is doing exactly the work that He was sent to do. John is to trust that, whether he understands the plan or not.

I do believe John trusted that. He trusted it day after day in that dark, dank hole until one day, God allowed a young woman's lascivious dance to lead Herod to make a reckless drunken vow. The result was the guards unexpectedly pulling John from his cell, tying him down to the block and bringing the axe down upon his neck. He was probably confused, frightened, and still faithful.

I think it is spiritually healthy to look at the story of John the Baptist's end and understand that, yes, this is the life of a Christian. This is the life of following Jesus, and that's okay. That is according to plan.

We know more than John. We know how Christ's victory came about; His victory in paying for all the world's sin in His own body on the cross; His rising to life again in victory over death itself. Sin, Satan, death—all vanquished. And we know Jesus ascended to the Father until He returns to put an end to this creation and usher the risen faithful to the new one forever. But yeah, in this broken creation John's life of struggle, his imperfect faith, his suffering and end, that's still the playbook.

I don't think any of us will end up in a king's dungeon cell. But unless Jesus comes back, we're going to die and that's never pretty. Our “prison” that makes us question Christ may be our own body as it is falling apart or ravaged by disease. We may wonder, “How can this be the plan?” but we know that

because of sin, death to this life is the cursed reality. Yet we know Jesus is forever Lord, Redeemer and Savior. Facing death, I think believers end up clinging more tightly to Christ, trusting that He truly is the victor over that death.

Where we might struggle more so is those situations in life where the plan seemed obvious. A marriage or a family unravels and you know it's not supposed to be that way. God's design is "until death parts us" and "honor thy father and mother." But that's not how it goes and we doubt. We expected better and we wonder if Jesus really is the One, the king who is reigning over the broken situation.

In Christ's very church this happens a lot. We try to serve faithfully and be loving to our brothers and sisters in the faith. Yet they treat us badly, slight us, say something nasty and unloving. We react with anger and bitterness. That's not the plan! Christ's church is supposed to be peace, love and harmony! Is He in charge?

This happens in every single aspect of life. We have good intentions, good plans that we think will be God-pleasing and in loving service to others. We're carrying out the vocations God has given to us. Yet instead of being blessed, they turn sour. They're not what we anticipated and rather than our attitude being joyful, loving and enthusiastic, were confused, disheartened, even bitter and angry. What happened to that good plan? We may even question if Jesus is the One, the one who is in charge and doling out blessings on His people.

Jesus pointed out to John how He was indeed fulfilling the promises of Holy Scripture, despite what the evil and cruel world was doing in John's life. We have the same fulfillment of God's promise made clear to us in the cross and empty tomb. We have the "He will save His people from their sins" fully accomplished and delivered. That forgiveness and redemption continues in the midst of the evil, cruel and unjust world in which we live. We bear its afflictions in faith.

"And blessed is the one who is not offended by me." This is the main point Jesus makes. He is the Messiah. He is accomplishing the task for which He has been sent—to take away the sins of the world. Why would anyone take offense at Him? Well, they would, if taking away the sins of the world isn't enough for them

That's our problem much of the time. Jesus has a plan of salvation; one that stands accomplished for us 2000 years ago, one that He still accomplishes upon the penitent daily through Word and Sacrament. We're going to live forever in bliss; but we're called to bear our cross in a fallen world for a while first.

We often don't like that plan; find it kind of offensive. We often have a supposedly better plan that usually has to do with making this life less broken because we think we deserve better. It's usually a pretty self-centered plan that has to do with the world getting in line to serve us rather than us humbly serving others. Our plan trusts in this life, our life, our world, rather than the perfect life Christ has won for us.

"Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord," writes James. Jesus' plan is the best plan, the forever plan, and He is doing it to you now and forever—even in the midst of your frustrations and trials, even in the midst of the offenses of others you bear, most especially in your own death to this life. Jesus' plan is not to improve the cursed life; it is to overcome it with perfect life forever.

See how good this is, how good He is to you, and don't be offended by Him. Stick with the plan, no matter what. He has seen it through already, through death and darkness to life and light. The plan is you doing the same in Christ.

Amen.