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St. John's & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Kimball, NE & Burns, WY

Third Sunday in Advent (Series C)

December 13, 2015

Text: Luke 7:18–28

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

For centuries, pastors and theologians have discussed and debated the mental state of John the Baptist as he sat in prison awaiting his fate. In the gospel text today, we find John locked away in prison because he had the nerve to call Herod Antipas to repentance. Herod had seduced his brother Philip's wife – Herodias – convinced her to divorce her husband and marry him instead. John called Herod to repentance saying that his actions were an offense to God. Herod did what so many perverse men with power have often done: silenced the preacher of truth and justice. John was thrown in jail. And there he sat, languishing in jail for being faithful to his prophetic call.

John heard about the things Jesus had been doing, according to vs. 18. In particular, the miracles recorded in the verses just prior to today's reading are some of the most dramatic. Jesus heals a Roman centurion's son from a distance, the Lord doesn't even have to go to the boy. The centurion believed so firmly in Jesus' authority over sickness and evil that the centurion told Jesus not to bother with coming back to the boy. Just speak the word and the boy will be healed. And Jesus said He hadn't seen such faith in all Israel. The boy was healed at that moment!! In addition to that great wonder, Jesus raised the widow's son from Nain. Through this miracle, the Lord gave a preview of His own resurrection from the dead that would take place on Easter morning.

It was these kinds of things that John heard about in prison: the healing, preaching, and saving ministry of Jesus. John's cousin whom John baptized and declared to be the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. After hearing about these things, John calls for two of his disciples and send them to Jesus with a most important question, "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" (vs. 19). It's a question for all ages. And every human heart and mind will need to give an answer to it in one way or another.

And that's where the centuries of debate have come in. Is John beginning to have doubt about Jesus? Are you the one? Did I make a mistake in declaring you to be the

Messiah? Or is it possible that John is sending his disciples to Jesus so that they can learn who Jesus is and begin following Jesus instead? John himself had said, that he must decrease and Jesus must increase. The truth of the matter is the Bible doesn't give us such details about John. What we do know, is that for whatever reason, John sends two disciples to Jesus with a question we need to consider today even in the 21st century Christian Church, "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" (vs. 19).

Are you the one Jesus? Are you the one upon whom we can confidently place all our hopes, all our trust for a better future in this life and the life to come? When things are easy and everything fits into what we think should be normal and right, it's quite easy to say yes. All our expectations are being met. Jesus you're the one.

But then things begin to challenge those expectations. Personal tragedies shake our confidence in Jesus. Are you the one? Look at what's happening to my friends, my family, my country, my world. Jesus don't you see what's happening all around us? The sorrow and suffering of the world appears to go unchecked. John the Baptist had preached that there was a time coming in which evil would come to an end. The righteous reign of the Lord would break in upon the world and things would be set right. But that doesn't appear to be happening. Not even for John! We have not one shred of evidence that Jesus did anything to get John the Baptist out of jail. No protests! No civil disobedience. As far as we know, Jesus didn't even go and ask Herod to release Jesus. In fact, we know that John would soon be executed. He never left that prison.

The disciples go to Jesus and dutifully ask their question (vs. 20), "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" The answer given to John's disciples is given in two ways. The first answer is that they see the healing ministry of Jesus. "In that hour Jesus healed many people of diseases and plagues and evil spirits, and on many who were blind he bestowed sight" (vs. 21). Jesus has power over the evil of this world, both physical evil and spiritual evil. That's the first answer.

The second answer comes from Jesus Himself, "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" (vs. 22–23). Yes. Jesus has power over the physical and spiritual power of this age. But there's something more significant that must be considered. Jesus demonstrates His power of evil in His healing and

preaching ministry. But those great things are only indicators of things greater. Jesus didn't come to put a larger-than-life band aid on our sorrows and sufferings. He came to eradicate evil for all eternity. It had to be defeated, not just treated on a case by case basis. Hence that last admonition and blessing, "Blessed is the one who is not offended by me."

Tell John that I am the one who is to come. But I will go about giving an answer for evil and sin and death and all human suffering and sorrow through means that do not follow man's expectations. We human beings want God to swoop down and fix the troubles and cares of the world in fell stroke. Just flex a little divine muscle and all will be well. But that's not what Jesus does. Instead, He submits Himself to a sinner's baptism given by John himself. Jesus preaches about God's kingdom that comes through Holy Spirit-created faith and trust rather than raw, divine power and glory. John will not live to see what we know Jesus will do during Holy Week and Easter. The long-awaited King returns to His capital city in joy and triumph. He gives to His church His last will and testament of His own body and blood given and shed for us Christian to eat and drink until He comes again at the end of the age. Jesus allows Himself to be arrested, falsely condemned, scourged, and then crucified unto death.

But these things He does with the promise that He will rise again three days later, which He does. Though He rises from the dead, our Lord does so in a rather subdued manner. Only a few disciples see the empty tomb. A few more will actually see and touch and hear the resurrected Lord. But He doesn't make a grand appearance in the Temple or Pilate's home or in the senate in Rome or in Ceasar's grand estate in Italy.

No, Jesus comes to those who believe with a promise that His life, death, and resurrection are God's answer to sin, sorrow, suffering, and death. His promise is not the absence of evil before the end of the age. Our Lord does not take out a huge eraser and clear away the stains and mistakes of this world. Instead – and this is where we find our Lord's words about not be offended coming into play – victory and joy and peace are given to redeemed hearts and minds who live by faith while experiencing the troubles of this world.

Jesus gives an answer to evil that John, his disciples, and every form of human reason did not expect or look for. Our Lord's answer is: through His death, resurrection, and ascension, people find forgiveness of sins and reconciliation between God and man. Through faith in Jesus, sin and evil are forgiven. Through faith in Jesus, the Holy Spirit lives in redeemed hearts, minds, and souls. Through faith in Jesus, we look

forward to a time when evil is forever sealed away in pits of hell. Through faith in Jesus, we believe a new heavens and a new earth will be created in which evil can never invade again. Through faith in Jesus, we find joy and comfort and victory in the knowledge that we will be reunited with all our loved ones who died in the saving grace of our Lord.

Jesus never casts us aside for asking questions. He never chastises us for longing to be released from these evils days. Instead, He carries us in His arms of grace. Those miracles pointed to God's ultimate answer: Good Friday and Easter. There we find our hope and joy and peace. The Lord is making all things new, including our own hearts, minds, and bodies too on the Last Day. In the meantime, we live by faith, carried by His love and sustained by His grace.

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.