

Sermon for The 3rd Sunday in Advent (Gaudete)

Isaiah 35:1-10, James 5:7-11, Ps 146, Matthew 11:2-15

“Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?”

Is Jesus the one?

The Jewish Leaders said, “No.”

The Romans said no because they have our own gods.

Philosophers say no because they have our own answers when it comes to the meaning of life.

Scientists say no for the evidence does not add up.

A politician may say no because our policies and programs lead us to an ideal world.

The Church answers this question with a resounding, “Yes!” Jesus is the One. We do not need to look for another! Jesus is the eternal Son of God who came born of the virgin Mary and laid in a manger, was crucified on a cross and rose from the dead for our salvation and ascended into heaven to judge the living and dead.

Jesus is the who comes as two or three gather in His name, forgiving sins, restoring relationships with God and with each one of us and with us to the end of the age.

Jesus is the one who will come again in power and glory to bring to usher in the Kingdom of Heaven in its fullness and completeness.

This message of God’s love has been proclaimed starting in Jerusalem, to Samaria, then to Galilee, to the Romans, and to the ends of the earth for the last 20 centuries. It is a message that goes out into the community where we live, through our witness in acts of love for neighbor and using words if necessary. It is brought to philosophers, to scientists, to politicians, to shop and store owners, to the hurting, to the young, the middles aged, and the senior citizen. Yes, Jesus is the one says the Church. And your response to this message will determine how you live, and how die.

John the Baptist of all people asks this question in our gospel for this day. John the Baptist, the great forerunner of Christ, who baptized Jesus, who saw the heavens opened, and a dove descend upon Jesus, and heard the voice from heaven declare, "This is my Son, the beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

Is John having second thoughts? Has the age-old problem of doubt set in when it comes to Jesus? If John is second guessing, who could blame him. John is languishing in Herod's prison. Perhaps John is not doubting but is asking this question on behalf of his disciples, "Are you the one or should We look for another?"

Whether this is John's question or his disciples' question, John sends them to Jesus. How does Jesus answer? With words from Isaiah's prophecy: "The blind receive their sight and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have the good news preached to them." These are the signs that God has come to save. They were not the saving acts; they are the signs. Hardly the fire bringer who has his axe laid at the root of every unfruitful tree that we heard John proclaim last week. Actually, what Jesus was doing is taking on what afflicts you and me. To overcome the sins that affect our lives and the death that is in each of us and in the world.

Is Jesus the one or do we need to look for another?

Who can you think of who may be asking this similar question today who are right outside the doors of this beautiful sanctuary? A person losing their home. A family struggling to make ends meet. A family in the deep gloom of grief after a loved died. A lonely person in a nursing home with no one to visit them. An addict losing the battle against their addiction. Who else can you think of that the church needs to go today? Where are we being called to point others Christ and tell what He did by His coming, what He is doing today, and What He will do in the future.

Life and salvation was breaking in Jesus, and the new beginning of a new world. That is what we hope for, new life, no more death, no more sin, and peace on earth. For years scientist, philosophers, and politicians have tried to accomplish this new world, but all their heroic efforts come up short. The existence we hope for, The real life, the peace in the midst of strife is never be found in the things of this world. All these things come outside of our ourselves. From the God who

Isaiah points us to, who ransomed us from all who that afflicts us and holds us captive.

This Ransom makes me think of dramas where one is kidnapped and demands a ransom or payment to release them and return them to family. The person who is held is scared. Sometimes there is an exchange, one hostage for another. And in Jesus He is one who pays that ransom by taking on our sins. He takes on your sins and in exchange He gives you His divine life, His righteousness, which Luther called the happy exchange.

What Jesus did before, are all signs that gave others and us too smaller freedoms, through the healings of sight, hearing, cleansings, and good news preached to the poor. These all point us to the great ransom of the Christ's promises won for you through His death and resurrection.

If one is satisfied with the smaller freedoms, the brief moments of peace, and merry Christmas and peace and good will we hear so much of this time of the year and then back to same old life again, then Jesus is not the one. Jesus came to at Christmas to accomplish so much more and greater. In this world we can only get so far on our own.

Jesus says, "Among those born of Woman, which would be all of us, there is no one greater than John the Baptist. And that would be the best you can do here on earth. But Jesus continues, "The one who is least in the Kingdom of heaven is greater than John." Is greater than anything we see in this world. Yours is the life That Jesus gave his for and that makes you a pretty valuable in His eyes. It gives you the Greater life than anything you can achieve on your own. It is life that is entered into through our baptism by God's grace, living this out in the relationship of faith which His death and resurrection restored for you. It makes you a citizen of heaven today, yet still on a journey here on earth. Traveling through this world with all kinds of wars, with sins, with hatred, and violence. And even our own difficulties too. Yet He is with you.

That is our joy today. To remind us of the answer of the question John asks to today, "Is Jesus the one who is to come?" And our resounding answer is a resounding yes, "He is the one who came, who still comes, and who has promised to come again." "The Lord is at hand," James proclaims in preaching, in water that baptizes, in the signs in the community that God is working in our friends and

neighbors but are waiting to hear about it from hopeful redeemed disciples such as yourselves. A little grace, lots of forgiveness, many encouraging words, lots of acts of love. May the message of this gospel of God flow from here this day.

The peace of God that passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Amen