

# GAUDETE (ADVENT 3)

December 17 2016

Isaiah 40:1-11

I Corinthians 4:1-5

Matthew 11:2-10

## ***Standing...***

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our Advent herald is John the Baptist—  
who sticks out like the pink candle on our advent wreath.

Our Lord's word to him is,  
*"Blessed is whoever is not trapped in connection with Me."*  
It's a good word to John and us.

Let us pray. These are Your words Holy Father. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

## ***Sitting...***

Two weeks ago our focus was upon Jesus' first Advent in humility,  
when He was born in a lowly manger,  
eventually to ride into Jerusalem on a lowly donkey  
to face the humiliation of the cross and death.

Last week our focus was upon Jesus' second Advent—  
the one where He comes in glory—making our winter an eternal summer.  
It's the Advent we anticipate—the one to come.

Then we have this time in between...  
between Jesus' first Advent and His second,  
where we live now,  
waiting and watching—  
Sometimes in confusion and sometimes in doubt.  
This is where our gospel lesson comes in.

John's entire life was set up to herald the Advent of Christ,

and when he began his ministry on the banks of the Jordan River,  
 he did exactly what the prophet Isaiah said he'd do—  
 in that he would lift up every valley and level every mountain.

Lifting up the valleys included proclaiming repentance to the penitent,

**"Come and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins."**

Then comforting them with the good news that the Christ has come...

**"Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"**

Leveling the mountains is what John preached to the impenitent—

to the tax collectors, the soldiers and of course the Pharisees and Sadducees.

Where he said, **"You brood of vipers!"**

Repent for the Christ is coming for you as well.

**"His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out  
 His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will  
 burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."**

John was relentless,

never deviating from preaching Christ and His gospel  
 along with Christ and His judgment.

Even in the face of authority,

which is what landed him in prison.

As John sat there,

not knowing what lie around the corner for him,  
 he had this lingering, nagging question.

If Jesus is the Christ,

and John knows that He is (see John 1:33-34)—

Why wasn't the wheat being gathered into His barn,

and the chaff not being burned up with unquenchable fire?

As Jesus carried on His work,

it seemed to be nothing but grace—

the lifting up of valleys,

without a single act of judgment taking place.

In other words,

John believed. John preached, and John expected.

John did everything God sent him to do.

He's lived his life alone, in the desert, refusing every comfort of life.

He's preached God's Word boldly and purely and tirelessly,

and one by one, he's sent his disciples away  
to follow Jesus instead of himself.

John did everything he was supposed to do,  
but the Christ...*not so much*.  
The Lamb of God was to make all things right by,  
destroying wicked men  
and saving His people from suffering at the hands of sinners—  
Just. Like. John.  
The Romans were still running the nation,  
and the Pharisees were still running the city.  
The Sadducees were still running the Temple and  
it sounds as if Jesus has gone soft.

John trusted, but he didn't understand.  
And if that, at times, isn't every single one of us in this place, this morning,  
I don't know what is. You trust...but there are times, more so than you want to admit,  
where you simply do not understand.

And why is that?

Well, I can't be definitive,  
but I think it's safe to say that you want a God who makes things right, and  
does so right now!

Moreover, one might say,  
nothing seems to be improving in my life, in spite of being Christian.  
I see my sinful flesh just as wicked and active as ever,  
and I feel the struggle between faith and unbelief taking place in my own heart.  
I see the world winning battle after battle against Christians,  
and the Christian life becoming less and less  
comfortable as the days goes by.  
Christians suffer and die right alongside the wicked, and the devil?  
He seems to be laughing all the way to the bank.

*Gaudete in domino semper?* Rejoice in the Lord always?  
Who can do that when things are not as they should be?

And that line of thinking...  
can lead us to anger and cynicism  
to fear and despair—  
even to loosing our faith altogether.

It's from this darkness—

this confusion and doubt that John asks his question of Jesus,  
**"Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?"**

Upon hearing this by way of John's disciples,

Jesus could have used a word of Law to crush John's unbelief,  
 but instead the Lord answers John in a way that'll heal his faith.  
 He points John back to the Scriptures—

to places in the book of Isaiah which John no doubt knew.  
 Tell John this...

**The blind see and the lame walk;  
 the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear;  
 the dead are raised up  
 and the poor have the gospel preached to them.**

This was to remind John  
 that what the Scriptures say the Messiah will do—  
 Jesus was doing.

But didn't the same prophets promise fire and brimstone for the wicked?

Of course they did!

It seems that even John

didn't fully grasp that the coming of the Christ is twofold,  
 once in humility, and again in glory.

John was ready for Christ to ignite the "refiner's fire" upon sinners—  
 to lather up that "launderers' soap" on them,  
 of which Malachi foretold.

And though that will ultimately be fulfilled by Jesus,  
 not yet. Not now.

Because He still has compassion on the wicked, giving  
 them time to repent, to believe and be saved, even as  
 His patience with this world has led every one of you  
 and me to repentance and salvation.

What our Lord tells John is crucial—for John...and us. He says,

**Blessed is he who is not offended—  
 blessed is the one who's not tripped up—because of Me.**

That means Jesus may not do what you expect Him to at times.

I mean look, can someone stumble—maybe even give up on Jesus because they're not satisfied that His plan for this world includes suffering...

Sure, they can—but blessed are they who don't stumble over that.

Can one give up on Jesus because they're not content with the humble working of Jesus through the ministry of Word and Sacrament?

Absolutely they can do that too—

but blessed are they who don't give up on Jesus.

Beloved, you won't understand all the plans that God has for this world, or for your life for that matter.

You don't know the Day of His coming before He comes, and you won't escape the reality of this world's sin,

suffering and death, until you die.

Don't stumble because of that.

Don't be offended because of Jesus' ways—

or because the cross you bear is heavy,

or because He isn't making everything right, right now.

He will—but in the meantime, know that right now the kingdom of Christ remains hidden,

where He comes to earth and to the hearts of mankind with words—not fire but with humble words of preaching and teaching, words connected with outward signs

of water and bread and wine.

See, the launder's soap you get now is His abrasive Law exposing and condemning your sin.

This is followed by the cleansing power of His Gospel

as it drives you to Jesus and pronounces forgiveness over you.

For now, take comfort that you hear God speak to you through His Word and your pastors.

That He gives you His body and blood.

That He loves you and won't hurt you.

That He hears your prayers.

And that He has promised to hold you up,

as His dear child,

even in your darkest hour.

Jesus sent the light of His word into the darkness of John's prison cell,  
which sustained John's faith—all the way until his head  
was placed on a block and the executioner took his swing.

Was John present for Holy Week? No.  
What about for the institution of the Lord's Supper? No.  
He wasn't there to see the Son of God die on the cross  
and He wasn't there to hear the joyful news that, "Christ has risen from the dead!"

But you—you know these things to be true.  
You've heard these truths from the testimony of the Apostles  
passed down to you through the ages,  
and it is enough to sustain and keep you in the one true faith.

If you happen to be the one who is sitting in darkness and confusion right now.  
Know that the bruised reed He will not break,  
The smoldering wick Jesus will not snuff out.  
To the broken hearted, Jesus speaks peace.  
And to the barely burning,  
He says, "Blessed is whoever is not trapped in connection with Me."

In the Holy Name of Jesus, Amen.

***Standing...***

And now may the peace of God which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and  
minds through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

***Sitting...***