

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

Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?” And Jesus answered them, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: 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.

A question was posed to Jesus about himself. How did Jesus answer this question? He pointed them to the Scriptures and what was said by God through the prophets. He preached to them this word of God and pointed to the truth that in their midst is the one who not only promised the Christ, “I send my messenger,” but he is the one who fulfilled his promises. The Christ had come and there is no other. There is not an addendum to the work of our redemption. There is no other name in heaven or on earth by which man is saved. It’s Jesus and him alone, he is the Christ.

You know this as it’s been taught and preached to you. There is no question that Jesus is the Christ, and you shall not look for another. End of story, right? Well, to some extent, yes. But let’s go further and listen again to what Jesus said at the end of pointing them to his fulfillment of the Scriptures. He said, “And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.”

Now it’s easy to pick up your stones and start casting them outward at this comment. The world has plenty examples of how it responds to the word of God. Do people find Christ offensive? To those outside of Christ, yes. It is as the Greek word puts it a “scandal” or “stumbling block.” Jesus is the rock of offense yet the stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.

That’s all true. Christ is mocked. Scoffers scoff and ridicule the Holy Scriptures. The influence of the Christian church is dwindling to the point that things are becoming downright hostile to God’s people. This is all true and there is a call to repentance that is to be preached. You don’t have to look far or long to see any of these things.

This morning, though, the Lord is talking to you. So, what about you? “Blessed are those who are not offended by me.” Does that describe you who are sitting here? Jesus isn’t just talking to “those” people outside of the church, he’s talking to you today, right now. This is where things get a bit personal because it means you must look at yourself, your life, your heart, and examine it according to God’s word.

Look at your life in relation to Christ, his word, and his church. What’s your response when you hear and read the Holy Scriptures and listen to sermons? What’s your response? “If only I could only see him. If only my family would believe. If only I had answers to why I am suffering or the those I love are suffering. If only what his word says didn’t put me at odds with my friends and coworkers. If only he didn’t call me to repent of my sin. If only he didn’t tell me that following him was taking up our cross and following him and that being faithful means I or my family might miss out on certain things everyone else is doing.”

Or take it a bit in another. “I wish I could just see Jesus. I wish I could just have that one argument and then people would believe. I wish there would be some sign I could have as an extra measure and didn’t have to simply trust God’s promises from the Bible. I wish God would answer my prayer right now according to how I want it to be. God may be saying all these things and may say he still working in my life but I sure don’t feel like it.” By now, you get the picture. Listen to Jesus, “Blessed is the one who is not offended by me.” God calls to you hear the word of God and keep it. You are called to live by faith.

It's no different now in the sense that God’s word is given and proclaimed to you. Jesus has come there, there is no other. God’s word is given to you and you have it. Think about too, how accessible it is to you and the great gift you have of being able to come and sit here in this place freely and how you can go and readily get a Bible in your own language. God calls you to listen. He calls for the word of God to dwell in you richly. You are called to trust his word.

### Third Sunday in Advent—Gaudete—December 15, 2024

The people waited for years and generations for the Messiah to come and redeem them. They were called to listen and keep looking in faith to what God promised. You receive Christ and his benefits through the word of God and amid whatever is going on in your life you are called to trust your Lord. There are no stipulations on this and no loopholes. See where you have doubted. See where you have wavered. See where you have sought to exalt yourself. See all of this revealed to you by your Lord and repent.

There's also a temptation to offend by just simply being a jerk and not adorning the word of God with humility. The Christian life is a life lived in humility which confesses sin and clings in faith to Christ. It also, as a fruit of faith lives out a life which seeks to walk in the way that God instructs you through his word. Being a "doer of the word" as the Scriptures call it, is one who is not offended in confessing and living out the new life in Christ God has called you to and teaches you.

Your life gives witness to the faith you have been given. There's a reason why people are offended or sometimes roll their eyes at Christians when they say one thing and then their lives are completely different. The charge of hypocrisy leveled against the church is not always a false charge. Just as you are not to be offended by the word of God, don't let those things be your relationship to the word of God either.

The gospel is not just some afterthought or just one article of faith among the many things, no it is the predominant proclamation and informs how we speak, how we act, how we preach, and how we interact with the world around us. When we speak, even if it's hard words, we do so in the spirit that loves our neighbor because Christ has died for them even as he loves us. If God's word offends, then so be it, but let it not be said that we got in the way of the word of God in such a way as we became the scandal.

Living by faith is trusting the Lord who has created you, redeemed you by the blood of Christ, and called you by Gospel. Trusting in God's word regardless of the cost and not be offended by the word but seeing it for what it truly is, the words of eternal life, you cast all things onto Jesus. You trust that those who believe in Christ will never be put to shame as the Scriptures tell you. You suffer the consequences whatever they may be for your Lord speaks and you listen. You don't put yourself first and you know with confidence at the end of the day all things will work together for the good for those who are called according to God's purpose.

There is great comfort in all this dear people of God and great reason to rejoice exceeding with great joy. Confess your sin and see the Lord who is merciful and forgives you. Look outside of yourself and follow the example of John the Baptist who said of Jesus, "he must increase, and I must decrease." That's the voice of faith, a martyr's faith that goes even to death for the sake of Christ and his word knowing that in Jesus, the Lord who was promised and who has come and won the day, there is eternal life.

Sometimes you reap the benefits in this life and sometimes you are thrown in prison and eventually are killed as was the case with John the Baptist. Even during those times when it seems as though all hope is lost you keep trusting and clinging to Christ who words bring comfort and peace. In faith, through the word, you commend yourself and all people to God who alone is just, merciful, and gives life. Whatever the case or future entails, you keep letting God's word be a lamp to your feet and a light to your path for you know that the word of the Lord endures forever.

And you know, the more you look to Christ and outside of yourself the more joy you see and find yourself rejoicing in any and every circumstance. It happens and God does grant you to see this joy in the faith he has given to you. God's word becomes something for you as you go through this life too, it's comfort because you see God's faithfulness to his promises, he has made to you, and you know that each day the Lord is faithful and will always be faithful. You start to define your life by what God says and if called to suffer all even death for the sake of Christ and his Kingdom, then so be it you do it rejoicing every step of the way and until your last breath on this earth because you know you will be rejoicing before the throne of God forever with all of God's saints rejoicing with you.

Third Sunday in Advent—Gaudete—December 15, 2024

Take heart dear people of God this day. “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand.” That’s your response to your Lord speaking to you. It’s not offensive to you but reason to rejoice. People of God, it’s the third Sunday in Advent. Don’t look for another, look to the Lord Jesus who has come and is yours. The Lord has come, he comes to you now, and he is coming again. He’s here now so listen to him, take and eat his very body and blood given and shed for you. The day for rejoicing is here. Jesus has redeemed you by his blood and you are an heir of eternal life. Always remember that and cling to it. Christ is yours and you are his forever. What a joy that is to know this and have this and to confess this in the world. You are a Christian and in times of great happiness you rejoice clinging to Christ through his word. In times of great sorrow, you rejoice trusting in the same Lord who has washed you clean in the waters of holy baptism. In the humdrum day to day things of this life, you rejoice. When death stares at you and your life on this side of the grave is coming to an end, you rejoice.

“And Jesus answered them, ‘Go and tell John what you hear and see: 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.’” What a wonderful thing to have placed before your eyes today this Advent. God is yours and you are his. Strife, violence, sin, sickness, persecution, upheaval, the devil, and death have been overcome, and their works will come to an end. John the Baptist lost his head for the sake of Christ, but the Lord raises bodies from the grave to immortality and incorruption. Your future is a future of comfort and joy. Rejoice in him and rejoice as you look forward to that day when he comes again not in the lowliness of the manger or hidden in means but when he comes again in great glory as only, he can do. He is at hand he is coming again to take you to a comfort beyond compare that will last forever. Lord Jesus, “Stir up your might and come to save us. Alleluia.”

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