

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

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. And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.”

Certainty and confidence are two aspects of the Gospel that we are tempted to take for granted. The reason is because our old sinful man doesn't fear, love, and trust in God. Not only that but the devil is around lying and trying, as he always had, to get us to doubt the word of God. “Did God really say?” wasn't only said in the Garden of Eden, it's the tactic of the devil every day. And finally, to boot, the world wants us to take our gaze off Christ and his world and buy into and live what it calls wisdom which is fleeting at best and in league with the lies of the devil at worst. Even in the church, we see attempts to focus on ourselves for our certainty and confidence.

Today in the Gospel reading, John the Baptizer was in prison. He wasn't a murderer. He wasn't a thief. No, he was a preacher who preached to people. This wasn't simply he made them feel bad, he rightly accused them as a messenger of God of their sin. The rulers of the Jews didn't like him calling them out of their sin and to look to the coming Christ. There was real substantial content to his preaching. He called them a “brood of vipers” after all. The law of God he preached called them to repentance. Herod also didn't like John the Baptist when John called him to repentance as well for his vile deeds. John afflicted the comforted. And where did it get him? It got him thrown in prison and eventually killed because of the words that came out of his mouth.

People went out to hear John preach. He drew crowds. It was a sight to see. Jesus goes on further in Matthew's Gospel reading, “As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is he of whom it is written, “Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you.’ Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.”

Jesus asked the crowds before him why they heard John preach. He called them to examine their hearts to ask themselves, in a sense, “What'd you expect to hear from a faithful prophet of God? Were you just wanting a show, to be entertained, or were you expecting him to make you feel good?” John's job was simple; he was the messenger who was to prepare the way of the Lord. And what happened? What did this Jesus do to whom he was pointing? Well, “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.” It was just as the prior prophets all leading up to John had said. The Lord made good on his promises for he had come and did all things well. John pointed people to the sure and certain word of God.

Jesus was and is who he said he was, and he was and is what the prophets said he would be. This is certain. The Word Incarnate, Jesus, points the people to the Scriptures to give them certainty. God's word gives certainty. In these words, God's faithfulness is shown. The Lord kept his word to his people. The promised one who would deliver his people had come. He is the one who confirmed who is with miracles such as giving sight to the blind, giving mobility to the lame, hearing to the deaf, cleansing lepers, raising the dead, and preaching the good news that the poor in spirit would inherit the Kingdom of God, which is where true riches, eternal riches are found.

For John the Baptist, this is what he had been preaching. He was pointing people to Jesus. He was calling them to repentance; to turn from their sin and fix their eyes on the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He was pointing them to the one who even raises the dead as Jesus himself would lay down his own life and raise it up again on the third day. And for John, who would die because of what he said for the sake of God, there's great comfort for him

in prison and reason to rejoice. Jesus is certainly the promised Christ and there is a confidence to go even to death confessing this.

You think about this for your life. There is certainty in the Gospel. Without certainty there is no comfort. And that's the goodness and beauty of God's word. God speaks to you and you have what he says. Not only that but you cling to God's word and you have the assurance that God is faithful in all that he says and does. "The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever."

This very morning you have God at work for you in your life and you can be certain. God spoke to you those words through pastor whom he has sent to you to be his messenger, "I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." God is speaking to you right now that your Lord Jesus is the promised one who has come for you and has redeemed you. You can be certain that Christ has died for you because he gave his life as a ransom for you and by his perfect obedient life, his sacrifice to atone for your sin, and his resurrection that God says to you, this is all for you. Your sin is forgiven. You are righteous in his sight on account of Jesus. You have eternal life. This is what you hear and what you see through this word of God.

The promises of God ring through the darkness of sin and death and give life. This morning God is at work. Four brothers are baptized into Christ. This is what God is doing for them. Baptism is a gift and a certainty of eternal life because it's all the work of God, it all rests on God, it's all the grace of God for these brothers just as it is for you. God has attached his promises to the baptismal waters. God says in Mark 16, "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned." Peter preached in Acts 2, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself." God says in 1 Peter 3, "Baptism, which corresponds to this [the ark and the flood], now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him." God beautifully proclaims in Titus 3, "But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life."

The Scripture references go on, and the promises of God resound. God gives forgiveness, life, and salvation to you and you can be certain and look your whole life to those promises your whole life. When your sin tempts you. When the devil tries to assault you. When the world tries to get you to doubt what God has given, listen Jesus in a similar manner to today, "what does your Lord say?" Go back to words and trust them and be certain that you are child of God and an heir of eternal life for God has done it and he will not lie to you or forsake you. "The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever." Be confident, then, in God's word and what he has done for you in Jesus.

Everything that was promised by the prophets and fulfilled in Jesus belongs to you. You see, that means everything. Find comfort in Jesus because he is your Redeemer. Sin, death, and the devil afflict you. They want nothing more than you to suffer in hell for all eternity. This is the reality of being in this world and seeing all of sin and its consequences around you. Your Lord, though, is Jesus who has come, is here now, and is coming again. You have comfort. You rejoice in this life even now.

The Gospel gives you this certainty and you have confidence. You have the confidence to go through this life as one who has Christ and one who knows what your future holds. In this way you hear those words of the Introit, and they don't just teach you, but they define your as you walk by faith in this world. "Rejoice in the Lord always". God commands you to do that, but he also gives you the reason and substance of that joy and gives you comfort. Fixing your eyes on Christ crucified and risen you see that your sin is forgiven, and you stand righteous before the throne of God.

Look to Christ and see what you have now in him and what awaits you in the future. Be confident in this as his baptized people.

As Christians in this world looking toward the Last Day, this is all so vitally important. The devil is prowling around, and he wants you to find joy in the things of this world which will pass away and not remain as Jesus told you in the Gospel reading last week when he said, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.” And then do you remember what he said right after that? Jesus said, “But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap.”

Jesus knows you and the dangers you face to your faith in him. Listen to the Lord and heed his call. Repent for the Kingdom of God is at hand. Know who you are as God’s word confronts you in your sin. Don’t be fooled but stay awake. Go running to Christ for forgiveness and rejoicing in what Christ has done for you and the new life he gives you for the devil, the world, and your fallen flesh tempt you to run away from God and turn God’s word into the unloving bad guy who doesn’t care about you or your life. Say “no” to all those things because at the end of the day when you give into temptation, wherever and from whomever it may come you will find there is no real lasting joy. God calls you and all people to repentance because he desires that you live, he desires that you have, and now true joy found in Christ. Have confidence in Jesus and look to him through where he has promised to be for you in his word and sacraments. Be comforted in Christ and find your joy in him.

Comfort and Joy aren’t found in yourself, they are found and known when you look outside of yourself and look at Christ. Will you always see this comfort and joy well, not in an emotional sense as the world describes joy and has taught us to understand it. But you when you see Jesus and when you see that he has done all for your salvation and see that you have been given eternal life and he will guard and keep you in this forever, wow, then there is lasting joy. This is your baptismal life. Live out your baptism which daily drowns the old man and lives in the new life you have been given. God calls you to rejoice in the Lord always. He calls you to look to him at times.

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.

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.” People of God, it’s Advent. The Lord has come, he comes to you now, and he is coming again. 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. Be absolutely certain that 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. In times of great sorrow, you rejoice. 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 for you are confident in Christ who is your life.

“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.’” That’s why you rejoice and in whom you find your joy. Jesus has come. He’s here now so listen to him, take and eat his very body and blood given and shed for you. You have eternal life and a clear conscience to stand before God. Clinging to Jesus crucified for you there is great comfort because you know what your future holds. What a wonderful thing to have placed before your eyes today this Advent this certainty of who you are in Jesus. God is yours and you are his. Strife, violence, sin, sickness, persecution, upheaval, the devil, and death have been overcome, and their works will

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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. Rejoice in the Lord always. He is at hand. The Lord has come; he is here now and for you in his means of grace. Rejoice in the certainty you have in God's gifts given for you. Be confident in Christ as you trust his word and go through this life and know that Jesus is coming again to take you to a comfort beyond compare that will last forever. People of God rejoice, and come, Lord Jesus!

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