

Grace: God's undeserved love for each and every one of us. Mercy: God forgiving us our sin for the sake of His Son Jesus Christ. And Peace: peace of heart, peace of mind, peace with God. All of these are yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

The portion of Scripture before us today is found in the Gospel of Saint Matthew the eleventh chapter beginning at the second verse, and we read in Jesus' name:

***And when John had heard in prison about the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples<sup>3</sup> and said to Him, "Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?"<sup>4</sup> Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and tell John the things which you hear and see:<sup>5</sup> "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."<sup>6</sup> "And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me."<sup>7</sup> As they departed, Jesus began to say to the multitudes concerning John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed***

***shaken by the wind?<sup>8</sup> "But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Indeed, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses."<sup>9</sup> "But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet."<sup>10</sup> "For this is he of whom it is written: 'Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You.'***

Heavenly Father these are Your words and therefore they are the truth. We pray, Lord, that You would increase our faith through them. Amen.

Dear Redeemed by the Blood of the Lamb,

John the Baptist is always very closely associated with the season of Advent. The primary reason this is so, is because John was the forerunner of Christ... though not by much. We need to remember that John was born just months before Jesus was, so John was not a forerunner to Jesus' birth, but John was a forerunner of Christ nonetheless.

John is, perhaps, best known for his statement, “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” Announcing to all those who were around Him that “there is the one you are looking for. He is the one who will save you and make all things right with God. He is the one sacrifice that will be sufficient for all people. He is the one! Run to Him!” And though John made this most beautiful statement about our Lord and Savior, we know that many did not run after Jesus because John told them to. Thus, while it was not until a little later in his life, John the Baptist was a forerunner of Christ who was proclaiming His advent... His advent to His Savior-office, as it were.

And yet, so far in this Advent season we have seen two great messengers of Christ: first we had God’s Word which we heard about two weeks ago, and second we had were the natural wonders that God had placed to announce His Son’s coming. And now we have another messenger of God, John the Baptist. John, who would proclaim Christ and ultimately die for his proclamations is a messenger of God. And thus, dear Christian friends, we need to

remember that this season of Advent, and the Holy Christian Church, is filled with *Messengers of Christ*.

Looking at our text for today one can get easily confused... or at least try to come at it from two different directions. The first way people approach this text is to see John the Baptist in prison feeling sorry for himself. He is in prison about to die and he wants one more time to know that Jesus is indeed the Messiah. So John sends his disciples to inquire of Jesus, “Are you the one?” John, in a time of deep distress, just needs the comfort of knowing that Jesus is indeed the Messiah who was to come. And though John is in jail, it is all right.

The other school of thought, and the one that I prefer, is the thought that John the Baptist is simply sending his disciples to Jesus because he knows that he is about to die. John has proclaimed who Jesus is and what Jesus will do, and still John has disciples who cling to his every word and movement. So John, while in prison and knowing the time is drawing nigh, sends his disciples to Jesus so that they can get

a first hand appreciation for Jesus and come to follow Him... and not John.

To me it is like when a person comes to me for a theological answer and I tell them, “well let me have you read some Scripture or what this other person says.” I am not trying to shirk responsibility, but why not send you to the source if I can... and honestly what better source could John send his disciples to than Jesus Christ?

And as the disciples come to Jesus you can sense a little apprehension in them. They are coming to see the “messiah,” really? Like most good Jews you can imagine them expecting someone a little more regal, a little more special. I mean John did say that he was not worthy to untie the sandals of the Messiah... and this was Him? A man who is surrounded by sinners and a man who is so lowly and humble.. He’s not a king. He’s not royalty. He’s just a guy from Nazareth and we all know that nothing good comes from Nazareth.

And is this not the attitude that many people have today? Really, your Savior is some guy who died? Doesn’t seem like much of a Savior to me. Really your Savior was a carpenter, what exactly did He save you from uneven tables? Really your Savior was born in a stable where cows and donkeys eat, what He couldn’t afford a house or hotel? Really your Savior was born to a teenage girl who claimed to be a virgin... good try.

So many arguments against our Savior and His appearance and I worry that at times we allow them to taint our own views of our Savior. I mean with His lowly birth and life, maybe Jesus can be my Savior for the small stuff, but when it comes to the big things the bank is a much better Savior. I can see them, I can get things from them, I can go to them when I need to. Or maybe a friend is a Savior because of the great help they have been to us. Maybe a child is a Savior because ever since I’ve had this kid now I can see the beauty in mankind and appreciate it more fully. Maybe a fictional person is my Savior because, let’s be honest,

there is no Savior that can save me from everything.

As Johann Gerhard notes about this text, ““We, of course, should indeed never be offended over Christ. To our reason and our flesh, everything about Christ is offensive. Our flesh and blood thinks: can this Person who so pitifully hangs on the cross be God’s Son? Can He be the only Mediator and Redeemer? Is His Righteousness to be ascribed to us? Can Christ’s kingdom be such a tiny, despised little heap? Are these people whom He sticks under a cross to be Christ’s disciples? Is this to be the noble life to which Christ directs us with the example of His love, patience, humility and gentleness? To sum it up: To our flesh and blood, everything about Christ is offensive.”

You can see so much worry and doubt in the disciples of John and what does Jesus point them to? Not to His pedigree nor to His history... but rather He points them to what He has done. He tells them that the blind see, the deaf hear, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the dead rise from the dead. Jesus

points out what great works He has done and how people are benefitting from His life. It makes you recall the text from Isaiah (61:1), “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, because the Lord has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound.” Jesus is pointing John’s disciples to the things that were foretold about Him in God’s Word... and about the miracles or signs that would point Him out.

However, in my listing I left out one thing that Jesus referenced... did you hear it? Jesus, as the last thing and the most important thing, tells John’s disciples that the poor are having the good news preached to them. Those who need it are hearing the Gospel... and there is nothing better that Jesus Christ could give to them.

Jesus was telling the people of Israel, and us today, that through faith in Him all of our sins would be forgiven. Faith that Jesus lived the perfect life in accord with God’s Word. Faith that Jesus Christ hung on the cross and as He

was there He paid the punishment for all of our sins. Faith that though He was going to die, He would rise from the dead. Faith in all that Jesus Christ has done for each and every one of us.

Jesus was making sure that the good news was being preached to all people. Yes, He was healing them and fixing their woes, but much more importantly Jesus was healing their spirits. Jesus was making sure that the “poor” would hear the word of God and know their Savior. As Martin Luther preached about the very text, “Surely these poor are not the beggars and bodily poor, but the spiritually poor, namely, those who do not covet and love earthly goods; yes, rather those poor, broken-hearted ones who in the agony of their conscience seek and desire help and consolation so ardently that they covet neither riches nor honor. Nothing will be of help to them, unless they have a merciful God.”

And this too is the message of the entire Christian Church: we preach Christ crucified for the sins of the world. We preach the good news to the poor, that through faith in their

Savior they have eternal life waiting for them. While the world needs our help in other ways, the most important way we can be of service and help the world is to tell them about their Savior... just like Jesus did.

I would like to leave you today with a concluding remark preached by Johann Gerhard for this text, “However, here we are to do what the disciples of Christ did in John 6. While many were offended by Christ and turned themselves away from the Lord Christ, the Lord asked His disciples whether they also wanted to forsake Him and turn away from Him. Thereupon Peter replied: Lord, where should we go? You have the words of eternal life! This Word of Life is the true Light. When we follow after it, we will not stumble on account of this Cornerstone, nor be offended by it.”

Dear friends in Christ, this season of Advent is filled with, not only scary passages, but many of the messengers of Christ. God’s Word, the signs God has placed around us, and now His more bodily messengers the prophets. The

messengers of Christ not only take His special power to people, but most importantly they take His Word and His promises. Just like the prophets, John the Baptist, and the apostles, we too can be messengers of Christ. Taking His message to the ends of the earth, not being offended or stumbling on account of Him... but sharing His love, His life, His death, and His resurrection with the world. Through faith in Jesus Christ, may He bless us through His Word and so allow us to be a blessing... because of Him.

Thanks be to God. Amen.