

## The Third Sunday in Advent

### Text: Matthew 11:2-15 (NIV)

<sup>2</sup>When John heard in prison what Christ was doing, he sent his disciples <sup>3</sup>to ask him, “Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?” <sup>4</sup>Jesus replied, “Go back and report to John what you hear and see: <sup>5</sup>The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. <sup>6</sup>Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me.” <sup>7</sup>As John’s disciples were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: “What did you go out into the desert to see? A reed swayed by the wind? <sup>8</sup>If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in kings’ palaces. <sup>9</sup>Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. <sup>10</sup>This is the one about whom it is written: “I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you. <sup>11</sup>I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. <sup>12</sup>From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it. <sup>13</sup>For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John. <sup>14</sup>And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come. <sup>15</sup>He who has ears, let him hear.

### *Theme: Is Jesus What You Expected?*

One of my favorite Christmas movies is “A Christmas Story” in which Ralphie looks forward to one special Christmas present, a Red Ryder bb gun. At first it seems as though he doesn’t receive it. Although he receives some nice presents, none of them are what he expected. We all have some expectations about gifts, and we can be a little disappointed if they are not what we expected. For instance, a husband might buy his wife the best ironing board on the market, and I would guess that it wouldn’t be quite what she expected. We have all received gifts when we thought, “That’s not quite what I was expecting.

The greatest gift that any of us have ever received is our Savior Jesus Christ. Today I would like to ask whether He is what you expected.

I. Sometimes Jesus doesn’t work at all like we expected.

It was that way for John the Baptist. He called on the people to repent and to prepare the way for the Lord. He pointed them to Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Many people did confess their sins and were baptized for the forgiveness of their sins. But John also preached judgement for those who didn’t repent. He called the pharisees and scribes a brood of vipers. He told King Herod that it was not right that he took his brother’s wife. He spoke of the Lord’s judgement in vivid terms. He said, “[*The Lord’s*] winnowing is in His hand, and He will clear His threshing floor, gathering the wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire.” (Mt 3:12) What happened? The pharisees and sadducees still sat in the seats of power in the Sanhedrin. King Herod still ruled. In fact, he had John arrested, and John had now been in prison for about a year. You can imagine that John would have begun to doubt. Things were not playing out the way that he had expected.

It was that way for most of God's prophets. When Moses was leading the children of Israel, they built the golden calf while he was receiving the 10 Commandments on Mount Sinai. They were constantly complaining and grumbling against both him and God. There were even times when they wanted to elect a new leader and return to Egypt. One time the people were complaining about the manna. Moses was so troubled that he complained to God, "*Why have you brought this trouble on your servant? What have I done to displease you that you put the burden of all these people on me?*"<sup>12</sup>*Did I conceive all these people? Did I give them birth? Why do you tell me to carry them in my arms, as a nurse carries an infant, to the land you promised on oath to their forefathers?*"<sup>13</sup>*Where can I get meat for all these people? They keep wailing to me, 'Give us meat to eat!'*"<sup>14</sup>*I cannot carry all these people by myself; the burden is too heavy for me.*"<sup>15</sup>*If this is how you are going to treat me, put me to death right now—if I have found favor in your eyes—and do not let me face my own ruin.*" (Num 11:11-15) After Elijah won the contest with the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel, Queen Jezebel vowed to kill him. Elijah fled and complained to the Lord, "*I have had enough Lord, Take my life...*" (1 Ki 19:4) All of the prophets had times when they would get very frustrated because the people were rejecting God's Word. Habakkuk even began his book with a complaint, "*How long, O Lord, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you, 'Violence!' but you do not save?*" God seldom worked the way that these men expected.

Especially the way that Jesus saved us can be an offense. Jesus told the crowd, "*Blessed is the one who is not offended by Me.*" His cross is often called an offense, because that is not the way that we would expect God to save us. Who would expect the Savior of the world to be placed in a manger? Who would have expected Him to be rejected by the religious leaders? Who would have expected Him to suffer and die a humiliating death on a cross? None of His followers were expecting His resurrection on Easter morning. No one expected the way that He would save us.

He doesn't always work the way that we expect in our lives either. That can get us frustrated. A good example of that was Buffalo Bills receiver Steve Johnson a few weeks ago. He dropped what would have been the winning touchdown pass. After the game, he sent out this infamous twitter, "I PRAISE YOU 24/7!!!!!! AND THIS HOW YOU DO ME!!!!!! YOU EXPECT ME TO LEARN FROM THIS??? HOW????!! ILL NEVER FORGET THIS!! EVER!!!" We might not broadcast it to the world like Steve Johnson did, but we do get frustrated at God sometimes because He is not working the way that we expect. Why do I have these troubles, why are my finances in such shambles, why am I having so much trouble with my kids, my spouse or my parents, why does work have to be so annoying? Why is my life so hard? Why is the world so unfair? It might even get to the point that we question whether our faith is even in the right man.

II. But then our Lord strengthens our faith by showing us the big picture.

He did that with John. He told John's disciples, "*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 the good news preached to them. And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.*" The Gospel was going out. Many more people were repenting. Our Lord was doing great miracles. The ministry that John began was going even stronger through the work of our Savior Jesus Christ. Our Lord really did have everything under control. John was also an important part of that Gospel ministry. In fact, he was a very important part, and his work was still bearing fruit.

He also strengthened His prophets in the Old Testament. He gave Moses 70 elders to help him bear his responsibility. God assured Elijah that there were still 7,000 in Israel who had not worshiped Baal, and He gave him Elisha to help with his load. God answered Habakkuk's complaint with the famous words, "*The righteous will live by faith.*" God assured Him, that He has everything under control, just maybe not the way that Habakkuk expected.

It was also through that cross that Christ accomplished the salvation of the world. He bore the punishment of our sins while He was suffering. He rose as our Savior from the grave. No one expected God's Son to redeem us with His innocent death, but He died and rose that He could conquer sin, death, and all the power of the devil for us.

God is still in control today. We often question what God is doing. Why doesn't He punish the wicked right now? Why do we suffer so much? Basically we ask why we can't have heaven on earth. It's good when we bring those struggles to Jesus as John did because He reassures us as He reassured John. In His Sacrament He reassures us that He gave His body and shed His blood for the forgiveness of my sins. In His Word He reassures us that He loves us and that He will never leave us or forsake us. As with John He gives dear friends who never leave our side, even in the darkest days of our lives. As with Moses and Elijah, He sends people to support us and strengthen us. He also tells us to look around us at what the Gospel has done and what it is doing in the world. It is doing its work to turn people from their sins to the love of God. There are times when He also shows us that our work in His name has not been in vain, but that He has also used us and the crosses that we have born for His glory.

It is tempting to be offended by Jesus because He seldom acts the way that we expect. Who would have ever expected the Savior to go and be killed in such a violent way? But by His cross He redeemed us from all of our sins. As His people we also have our crosses to bear. Don't ever let those crosses destroy your faith. Go to the Lord with your doubts as John did, and He will strengthen your faith with the assurance that He is the One who has come as your Savior.

Amen.

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December 12, 2010***