

Third Sunday of Advent

Text: Matthew 11:2-15

Theme: A Reed that Would not Sway

Things do not always go the way that we expected. We make a lot of plans for Christmas. We want to purchase the perfect gifts for our loved ones. We plan a meal, that we hope everyone will enjoy. We spend a lot of effort, decorating our homes. Then things happen. That gift that we thought was perfect, gets a funny look and is returned to the store. The guests complain about this or that in the meal that you worked so hard to prepare. The lights on the tree go out. The cat or dog or maybe a grandchild breaks one of your most cherished decorations. Someone gets ill and can't come or better yet, they do come and share their sickness with everyone on Christmas. Things don't always go as well as we hoped in our preparations. It might not be as bad as the movie Christmas vacation, but we can all relate to how we desire the perfect Christmas that never comes. That is why it is so important that our eyes are on Jesus at this time of year. He makes us into reeds that will not sway. He gives us confidence and joy, no matter what.

- I. John the Baptist wasn't swayed as he prepared the people for the coming of the Lord.

He went down to the Jordan River in the wilderness and called the people to repent of their sins and to be baptized for the forgiveness of their sins. People came from all over Israel to repent. Tax Collectors came, and he was clear with them that they should not cheat the people. Soldiers came, and he told them not to extort money, but to be content with their pay. When the Sadducees and Pharisees came, he said, *"You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath. Produce fruit in keeping with repentance."* There were lines of people waiting to be baptized. When Jesus arrived, he pointed to Him and declared, *"Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."*

John didn't care who came to him. He called them all to repentance. But then he told King Herod that it was not right that he took his brother's wife. The king didn't repent. Instead he locked John up in a dungeon. John had preached so boldly about Jesus, *"His winnowing fork ins in His hand, and he will clear His threshing floor, gathering His wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire."* But Herod was still in the palace, enjoying all of the best things in life, and now John was languishing in prison.

John even sent some disciples to Jesus to ask, *"Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?"* It seemed like John was about to be a reed that would sway in the wind. Who could blame him?

John's lament is similar to one that occurs very often in the Old Testament. Jeremiah lamented, *"Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all the faithless live at ease?"* (Jer. 12:2) Malachi complained about the same thing, *"Certainly the evil doers prosper, and even those who challenge God escape."* (Mal 3:15) Asaph complained, *"I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. They have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong. They are free from the burdens common to man; they are not plagued by human ills."* John was going through the same struggle as many of the prophets of old.

What does he do? He sent those disciples to Jesus. Jesus pointed to the many good things that were happening. The blind received their sight. The lame walked. Lepers were cleansed. The Deaf could hear. The dead were raised. The Gospel was preached to the poor. Those who were suffering because of the sin and evil of this world were being delivered by Jesus. The Gospel was bringing hope, peace, and forgiveness to many broken lives. The prophets, that I mentioned, all came to realize that those who rejected God's grace would also have their day, but there would be no one to catch them. They also realized that the day would come when God would clearly distinguish between the righteous and the unrighteous on the last day. Until that day John and all the prophets before Him found strength in God's grace and mercy for them in Christ. That faith made them into reeds that would not sway.

II. We won't sway either when we look to Jesus as our Savior.

There are so many things that could sway us. We all have our own personal issues. There is guilt for the sins that we have done and regrets that we have in life. Every person has their share of trouble. When we mourn, it only seems to be worse at this time of year. Our desire to be happy and joyful only makes us more miserable when we are not happy. There is the lament of the prophets. We all know people who are things that I can't say in a pulpit. They don't care about God or anyone else. They seem to be doing just fine. There seems to be so much polarization and dysfunction all around us today from the government right down into our families. Even the holiday that we are about to celebrate, which so often can't be named, seems to have been hijacked with all of the commercialization. (But that has been a lament for over 150 years!) With all the things going on around us and in our lives, we could despair.

But then we go to Christ. This Advent we hear those blessed words, "*Behold, your King comes to you, righteous and having salvation.*" On Christmas we will hear some of the greatest words of all, "*Unto you is born this day a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.*" Today Jesus says, "*Take eat and drink, this is My body and blood, which were given and shed for the forgiveness of your sins.*" Christ comes for you and me. He comes to take our misery and sin and give us His righteousness, His help, His strength, His peace, and in the end the gift of eternal life. We might have those days when we stumble and fall over the course of this life, but He is always there to pick us up, to guide us and lead us, until that day when He calls us to His heavenly kingdom.

When we believe that message, the Good News of God's love for us in Christ, we go from reeds that sway back and forth in all the troubles of this life to reeds like John the Baptist that stand firm in sure and certain confidence of God's love for us in Christ, no matter what. May God grant us all that confident faith of John the Baptist. Amen.

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