

I.N.I.

Second Sunday in Advent
Dec. 10, 2017
Matt. 11:2-11

In Christ Jesus, who is the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies, the One and Only Messiah, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

We have a real problem in our text this morning. What did we just hear? John the Baptist sending two of his disciples to Jesus to ask Him, **ARE YOU THE COMING ONE, OR DO WE LOOK FOR ANOTHER?** Our problem is, for whose benefit were they asking this of Jesus? Were these disciples of John wondering or could it be that John was wondering? Could it be that John had wrong expectations of whom the Messiah would be?

Last week we heard John the Baptist clearly speak of the One mightier than He who would come whose sandal strap he was unworthy to unloose. Again this morning we heard from our Gospel reading that John's calling was to bring the message of the Christ to the people. John said this One would come and baptize with fire and the Holy Spirit. He would come and take the believers, like good grain into His heavenly kingdom.

At the beginning of Jesus' public ministry John had baptized Jesus and saw the dove come down from heaven and rest on Jesus. He heard the voice of the Father say, **THIS IS MY BELOVED SON IN WHOM I AM WELL PLEASED.** In the Gospel of John we hear John the Baptist declare when He saw Jesus walking toward him, **BEHOLD THE LAMB OF GOD WHO TAKES AWAY THE SIN OF THE WORLD! THIS IS HE OF WHOM I SAID, AFTER ME COMES A MAN WHO IS PREFERRED BEFORE ME FOR HE WAS BEFORE ME. AND I HAVE SEEN AND TESTIFIED THAT THIS IS THE SON OF GOD.** On another occasion John told his followers, **I MUST DECREASE, WHILE HE MUST INCREASE.**

Personally, I don't believe that John was confused, doubting or wondering about the person of Jesus, that He was the Christ, but maybe John was impatient with the work of Christ. Both Moses and Elijah, two of the greatest prophets in the Old Testament showed their human, sinful impatience by questioning God and His timing, tiring of the burden of the work that God had given them to do. Perhaps as John was sitting in prison realizing that his days were numbered he wanted Jesus "to get on with it," to wield that axe that was laid to the root of the unbelievers, to burn the chaff, to bring judgment upon the world and take the believers to their heavenly home. Remember, Jesus' own disciples later on were somewhat impatient and wanted to call down judgment upon that Samaritan village that did not welcome Jesus. Jesus rebuked them. Do you remember what He said? **YOU DO NOT KNOW WHAT MANNER OF SPIRIT YOU ARE OF. FOR THE SON OF MAN DID NOT COME TO DESTROY MEN'S LIVES BUT TO SAVE THEM.** Perhaps John too, was impatient as he languished in jail.

But, it could also be that John sent his disciples to ask Jesus this question for their sake. John was in prison. His future release did not look imminent. Some of his followers did not yet see in Jesus, the Messiah. They were followers of John. But John had not come into this world to gather followers for himself, but to point to the Messiah. Before he died he wanted to make sure that his disciples also knew Jesus as the Christ, so that after he died they would not organize into some cult, call themselves Johnians, and devote their lives to his memory and teaching.

John's disciples had confronted Jesus once before when they asked Him why His disciples did not fast like they and the Pharisees did. At another time when John was baptizing, Jesus' disciples were also baptizing and John's disciples became jealous and said, **ALL ARE COMING TO HIM!** In other words, "He's becoming more and more popular." That's when John said, **HE MUST INCREASE, BUT I MUST DECREASE...HE WHO BELIEVES IN THE SON HAS EVERLASTING LIFE; AND HE WHO DOES NOT BELIEVE IN THE SON SHALL NOT SEE LIFE, BUT THE WRATH OF GOD ABIDES ON HIM.**

So how does Jesus answer these disciples of John? He encourages them to open their eyes and see what is happening and then compare that to what Scripture says. What was happening was a direct quote right out of Isaiah 35:5-6--miracles of healing were being preformed by Jesus; the dead were

being raised and the Gospel was being preached. This was taking place in two different ways--- physically and spiritually.

Physically the lame, blind, leprous and deaf were being healed, the physically dead were brought back to life. Spiritually by means of the Gospel--the spiritually blind had their eyes of understanding opened; the spiritually lame were taking steps of faith to follow Jesus; those who were spiritually deaf, whose ears were closed because of the traditions of men and their own work-righteousness were being led to HEAR the truth of the Word; those who were spiritually dead in their trespasses and unbelief were made spiritually alive. Jesus is saying, **LOOK, COMPARE AND BELIEVE! BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO ARE NOT OFFENDED BY ME!** Blessed are those who do not fall away because of their wrong expectations of Me.

These words of Jesus also apply to us. Advent is the season for expectation. Expectations of joy and excitement, of worship and praise, of parties and gifts, of family gatherings and feasting. Sometimes these expectations don't materialize as we had hoped and planned and then we are disappointed. We have expectations of ourselves, of each other, of our family and friends, of our fellow church members, of our pastor, of our fellow workers and classmates and many times these expectations hinder our relationship with each other.

Well from our text this morning we are warned against:

EXPECTATIONS THAT CAN CAUSE US TO STUMBLE

1) EXPECTING CHRIST'S ACTIONS TO FIT OUR IDEAS

John may have been impatient with Jesus' ministry thinking He wasn't accomplishing it fast enough. John's disciples definitely saw a big difference between the two. John's ministry was emphasized with a bold proclamation of the Law: **REPENT OF YOUR SINS!** Jesus' preaching and ministry was emphasized with a loving call and invitation of the Gospel: **COME TO ME FOR FORGIVENESS AND LIVE!** John's ministry took off like wildfire. He had most of Judea coming out to see him by the Jordan while Jesus worked in relative obscurity.

John's loyal followers had a hard time watching their teacher's influence decrease as Jesus' gradually increased. Were people flocking to Jesus because He seemed to give out forgiveness so easily? Perhaps this is what they concluded and resented Jesus' popularity. Whatever the reason, they had wrong expectations of Jesus.

So what are our expectations of Jesus? Do we expect Him to rain down fire and brimstone upon the godless of this world, to right all of the wrongs of our society? Do we expect Him to rid us of all of our worldly sorrows, grief and ills, to answer and solve everyone of our problems? Do we expect Jesus to make our lives peaceful and serene, with no problems or worries? Do we expect Jesus to provide everything we want for our physical well being and keep all of the bad things away from us? Sometimes it seems that way by the way we complain and gripe, murmur and criticize when things don't go our way: "I've got the worst life, the hardest job, the lousiest family, the least of blessings, the most worries, the greatest stress, the longest journey, etc, etc."

Do we find it hard to accept the fact that in Christ all sins are forgiven of others, no matter how serious or awful? Do we find it hard to accept that we are to be as patient, loving, forgiving, self-sacrificing, gentle, caring and sympathetic as Jesus was to others; to our spouse, to our children, to our parents, to our fellow workers, to our neighbors, to our fellow church members, even to our enemies?

Do we become impatient with our Lord when His agenda and timetable just doesn't seem to fit our ideas and desires? For these and a multitude of other expectations many have stumbled and fallen away from Christ.

But what about the other side of the coin? Jesus asked the people around Him about John: **WHAT DID YOU GO OUT INTO THE WILDERNESS TO SEE? A REED SHAKEN BY THE WIND? BUT WHAT DID YOU GO OUT TO SEE? A MAN CLOTHED IN SOFT GARMENTS? INDEED, THOSE WHO WEAR SOFT CLOTHING ARE IN KING'S HOUSES. BUT WHAT DID YOU GO OUT TO SEE? A PROPHET? YES, I SAY TO YOU, AND MORE THAN A PROPHET. FOR THIS IS HE OF WHOM IT IS WRITTEN: BEHOLD, I SEND MY MESSENGER BEFORE YOUR FACE, WHO WILL PREPARE YOUR WAY BEFORE YOU.**

WHAT DID YOU GO OUT INTO THE WILDERNESS TO SEE? Just what are your

expectations of this John? Did you expect a weak messenger, a wimp of a prophet that would turn with every shift in the wind of popular opinion? Did you expect a compromiser? Did you expect a person clothed in soft garments--an effeminate man--meaning a person who is not willing to stand up in his faith in times of temptation, not being bold? Well that wasn't John. He was a prophet, but yes, Jesus says, more than a prophet. He not only preached repentance, he lived it. He did not mingle with society. He dressed in camel skins and ate locusts and wild honey. He did not mince words when he saw wrong. His was not a life of luxury and leisure. His was a message of serious and demanding introspection of the heart. Many could and were offended by John and his message.

II: EXPECTING EASY TREATMENT FROM GOD'S LAW

How about us? Do we expect easy treatment from the Law of God that John preached? Do we stumble over the message of John: **REPENT OF YOUR SINS!** Do we expect to enjoy the Christmas Gospel without the Advent call to examine our hearts and prepare ourselves by acknowledging our sinfulness. It can happen! Expectations that can cause us to stumble is when we Christians expect easy treatment from God's Law because we know all about Christ's love. If Jesus is a God of love and forgiveness then we can live as we please, we don't need to come to listen to His Word so often and be in church so regularly. We don't need to listen real closely and seriously. We can willfully do what is wrong and always be exonerated, right?

If Jesus is as loving and forgiving as the Bible says, then it is O.K. to fight with our brother or sister, to argue and sass back and disobey our parents, then it is O.K. to not try at our marriage and serve our spouse because it is just too hard, then it is O.K. to not get along with my fellow workers, to live a life of pleasing myself and doing for myself; to speak whatever I want to and if it hurts others; oh, well; to drink alcohol to excess; to gamble; to be moody and grumpy; to be mean and cruel; to expect others to meet our needs!

We need to remember that Jesus' forgiving love never means **CONDONING SIN!** Jesus' everlasting mercy and grace never entails **EXCUSING SIN!** If that were true, then God could easily have pushed our sins into the background, swept them under the proverbial rug, and as a doting old grandfather just patted us on our heads and said, "that's alright. Do whatever you want, do as you please."

But He couldn't do that! He is our loving and our just God who said that it is not alright! He means what He said in His Law. **THE SOUL THAT SINS SHALL DIE! THE WAGES OF SIN IS DEATH!** But He also means what He said in His Gospel. **GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD THAT HE GAVE HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON THAT WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM SHALL NOT PERISH BUT HAVE EVERLASTING LIFE.** Jesus had to come to pay for our sins. Christ had to meet His Father's justice, by keeping the Law perfectly for us and then all of our sins were laid upon Him. He paid the price, He suffered the death and damnation we deserved.

There is the two-fold danger: 1) that we like John's disciples stumble over Jesus and reject the Gospel, but also there is the danger 2) that we like the people in our text stumble over John's message and reject the Law.

Yes, Advent is a time of self-examination with God's unchangeable Law as our source. The Holy Spirit through the Law leads us to be prepared for Christ by showing us our sins and our lost condition and our great need for a Savior. The Law must condemn us.

But Advent is also a time of great joy and rejoicing when the Holy Spirit leads us to repent of our sins and see in Jesus Christ, the Coming One, our Savior from sin, death and hell. Jesus is the cure, the answer, the remedy for our spiritual disease of sin.

Yes, John was a great prophet. In fact Jesus says in our text: **ASSUREDLY, I SAY TO YOU, AMONG THOSE BORN OF WOMEN THERE HAS NOT RISEN ONE GREATER THAN JOHN THE BAPTIST; BUT HE WHO IS LEAST IN THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS GREATER THAN HE.** John prepared the way for Jesus with his preaching and teaching, with his emphasis on the Law and on repentance, for without repentance of our sins there can be no faith and trust in Jesus for forgiveness of our sins. But John did not live to see these blessings come to pass. He did not see Jesus suffer and die on the cross and rise again triumphantly on the third day. He did not witness Jesus' Ascension into heaven or the glorious coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost and the miraculous spread of the Gospel throughout all of Judea, Samaria and the rest of the world.

That is why Jesus said; **BUT HE WHO IS LEAST IN THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS**

GREATER THAN (JOHN). We are greater than John by virtue of the fact that we are living in the fulfillment of the Kingdom with the devil bound by the Gospel message of Christ crucified and risen again and the Word being given free course to be preached throughout the world.

Perhaps you remember as a little child the eager anticipation and expectation you had on Christmas Eve or Christmas morning as you looked under your tree and saw the gifts. Which one was for you? What was inside? What could be in that beautifully wrapped package with your name on it?

May our Christmas expectation and anticipation be that of eagerly welcoming this greatest gift Jesus Christ into our hearts again and again with godly repentance, sincere devotion to His Word, heartfelt obedience to His will and a somber realization of His atoning sacrifice that gave us life and salvation. Then moved by that message of love we will eagerly give of ourselves, of our time and efforts, of our offerings and talents to make sure that the Law and Gospel continue to be preached and proclaimed to all the world until the end of time.

We pray this to God's glory and for the welfare of sinful mankind.

Amen.