

Third Sunday of Advent

December 16th, 2018

Pastor Matthew R Ude

Disappointment, Doubt, Christ

Luke 7:18-28 ¹⁸ Then the disciples of John reported to him concerning all these things. ¹⁹ And John, calling two of his disciples to *him*, sent *them* to Jesus, saying, "Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?" ²⁰ When the men had come to Him, they said, "John the Baptist has sent us to You, saying, 'Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?'" ²¹ And that very hour He cured many of infirmities, afflictions, and evil spirits; and to many blind He gave sight. ²² Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and tell John the things you have seen and heard: that *the* blind see, *the* lame walk, *the* lepers are cleansed, *the* deaf hear, *the* dead are raised, *the* poor have the gospel preached to them. ²³ "And blessed is *he* who is not offended because of Me." ²⁴ When the messengers of John had departed, He began to speak to the multitudes concerning John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? ²⁵ "But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Indeed those who are gorgeously appareled and live in luxury are in kings' courts. ²⁶ "But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet. ²⁷ "This is *he* of whom it is written: 'Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You.' ²⁸ "For I say to you, among those born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he."

You wait all year for Christmas, you rush down early in the morning, you tear off the wrapping paper and there in the box is . . . a pair of socks. Disappointed? Some of the older people in the congregation are thinking that's not a disappointment, that's what I want for Christmas. For that matter I actually gave my wife some socks earlier this month she was pretty excited about them. So yeah if you actually like getting socks for Christmas you can substitute whatever would be most disappointing to you.

Your father comes home. "We are going on vacation," he says. You get excited. "We are going on vacation," he continues, "to ROCKFORD IL." Disappointed?

I'm sure we can all think of something in our life that we were pretty excited for, but just didn't live up to the hype.

But is the coming of Jesus a disappointment? Does the premiere of Jesus life live up to the hype?

John's career started out pretty well. Thousands and thousands came out to see and hear him. Large crowds lined up daily to be baptized by him. Jesus himself came to be baptized by him. But then the crowds began to leave him to go after Jesus. Then he was thrown in prison. But at least Jesus was here. The messiah had come. The kingdom of God had come. And yet day after day, nothing much changed. John sat in prison. Jesus was out there preaching but where was the power? Where was the glory? Jesus didn't even come to visit John in prison. Did John begin to doubt? Did John get disappointed? Disappointed not just with where he was but with Jesus. Did the Messiah turn out to not quite be what he thought he would be? Does Jesus sometimes disappoint you?

Did John doubt? That is one of the overwhelming questions of this text. Many would say that, no, this is John the Baptist. He jumped in the womb at the presence of Christ. He was specially chosen by God. He was the forerunner. He was the baptizer. He was the voice. How can you ever believe that he doubted?

Well one could of course read the text in such a way as to say it was not John's doubts but his disciples. That they came and they were doubting and therefore John sent them to Jesus. But that is not the evidence of the text. All the evidence of the text implies that yes it was John who asked the question. John sent them. When they come to Jesus they make it clear this is John's question. And Jesus also says, "go and tell John." So it would certainly seem as though yes it was John's doubt

But this is not to John's discredit. In fact it puts him in very august company. Elijah doubted and ran away to the wilderness ready to die. Moses doubted more than once. Abraham doubted to the point where he committed adultery, because he thought that he had to help God fulfill his promises.

Far from being a discredit to John, this low point of his life shows to us in a very dramatic way that John is as Jesus says, "The greatest of those born among women." Because in his disappointment and doubt he turned to Jesus. Abraham committed adultery and Elijah ran away into the wilderness, but John turned to the Lord.

To insist that John could not have doubted is to make of John a caricature, a two dimensional figure. But instead to recognize him as a sinful human like us, who endured temptation including doubts, yet remained not only true to the Lord but the greatest prophet. This shows us a man of great faith.

So yeah John probably had doubts, especially sitting there alone in prison. Of course Satan saw his opportunity and struck using his favorite temptation. But this text shows us one whom even in his doubts put his faith in the Lord. When Satan apparently began to tempt him with doubts John fled to Christ his rock.

Listen to the plea of John, “are you the coming one or do we wait for another.” What was wrapped up in that question? Was my whole life wasted? Was all my work in vain? We thought that Christmas had finally come. We waited 4,000 years. Are we going to have to wait another 1000? Please tell me that it wasn’t all in vain.

Here we see the primary temptation of Satan. From the very beginning, Satan’s greatest tool is this, “Did God really say?” Did God really say you can’t eat from the tree? Did God really say that every unbeliever is going to hell? That seems pretty mean of him. Did God really mean it when he said that he gives forgiveness of sins through baptism? Is this really the messiah that John has been waiting for? This is the same old trick of Satan. And of course Satan was there whispering in John’s ear, what a coup for Satan if he could lead astray John the Baptizer.

But what does John do when he hears these whispers? He puts his faith in Jesus, He leans on Jesus. He simply asks the question. Asking the question is not an act of doubt but an act of faith. He was putting a lot of faith in Jesus to go to him with his doubts. In essence John is saying, “I know you are the Christ, but I’ve got these nagging doubts in the back of my head. Can you please help me get rid of them.

If John had only known. Sitting there alone in prison it looked to him like the end. But it wasn’t the end. If John had only known how close he was to his victory. John was faithful. He did his task. Now it was time for him to go home. It looked to him like he had lost everything but he was about to gain heaven.

Listen to Jesus reply. I can heal the sick and lame and blind. I can even raise the dead. If I wanted I could come free you from prison but I have something much better in store for you. I have come to preach the gospel. I have come to free you not from Herod but from sin and death.

Are you disappointed by Christ? Take away the lights, and the gifts, and the candy, and the cookies, and the singing , what’s left of Christmas? Just Christ and His word. Would that be disappointing? At this point you are probably thinking, “ok I’ll take the socks, it’s not much but at least I’ll have one present on Christmas morning?” Is Christ by himself enough to make Christmas Christmas?

“Blessed is he who is not offended by me.” Jesus says to the crowds. He is not accusing John, although the implication of the text is that that is what Satan was tempting John with. He is not accusing John but he is questioning the crowd? Are you going to accept me for who and what I am and rejoice in this, or do you only care for the gold and glitter of this world?

Are you in a cold dark prison, either real or metaphorically? The Lord is nearer than you think. His salvation is closer than you think. Maybe not only weeks away, but still closer than you realize.

Jesus doesn't come with mighty armies and glory. He doesn't promise us riches and an easy life. He promises only forgiveness of sins and eternal life, and that through tribulation and suffering.

In despair and doubt turn to the Lord, He is at hand to give comfort.

In despair and doubt wait on the Lord, His salvation is close at hand.