**Luke 7:18-28**

The disciples of John reported all these things to him. And John, **19** calling two of his disciples to him, sent them to the Lord, saying, “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?” **20** And when the men had come to him, they said, “John the Baptist has sent us to you, saying, ‘Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?’ ” **21** In that hour he healed many people of diseases and plagues and evil spirits, and on many who were blind he bestowed sight. **22** And he answered them, “Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them. **23** And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.” **24** When John’s messengers had gone, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? **25** What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who are dressed in splendid clothing and live in luxury are in kings’ courts. **26** What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell 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** I tell you, among those born of women none is greater than John. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.”

**“Do You Hear What I Hear?”**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. Some of the festive music this time of the year heard while driving, shopping, or caroling might have more purpose than we think. For instance, the song “Do you hear what I hear?” written by a married couple in 1962 was about concern over the Cuban Missile Crisis. People were living in fear of nuclear warfare and reality that could come from it. Yet, after this crisis passed, people put a different spin on the now famous Christmas Carol. A couple of decades later the husband who composed the words to this song noted, “I am amazed that people can think they know the song -- and not know it is a prayer for peace. But we are so bombarded by sound and our attention spans are so short that we now listen only to catchy beginnings.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

We do not need the Cuban Missile Crisis or threats now from terrorism to cause anxiety. No matter how many gifts wrapped, decorations hung, or fancy foods served suffering still falls upon us at this time of the year. This is why the third Sunday in Advent, shines differently from the other blue candles. Blue reminds us of the hope that comes in Christ. Yet, the pink candle is lighter in color to lift up our hearts. There is joy in what Christ brings. The Scripture texts today are all about conditions of suffering. Israel was going to face destruction by Babylon, St. Paul writes words from prison in Rome, and John the Baptizer was facing a bleak future. Advent tells us with all hopefulness there is a reason to rejoice. Since Jesus is the “Coming One,” blessed is any not offended by Him.

The offense was self-evident to John. He could see it with walls closed in around him. He could hear it with the clanking chains on his hands. He could feel it with the cold darkness as he sat in jail. The one who had “prepared the way for the Lord” that was in the sight of all at the Jordan, that was calling all to a baptism of repentance, that was with all in the heat of the wilderness, now had a head on collision with his life. Herod arrested John at the snap of a finger for denouncing his marriage. For the time being, it was a stalemate, but the baptizer was no fool. Things could change and go south if Herod’s wife had her way. John began to have doubts under such pressure. He wondered over what he had at first known so well about Jesus. If He was the Messiah, where was his winnowing fork to clear the threshing floor? Why was Herod not brought low? Why was John kicked aside while preparing the Lord’s way?  
 Our faulty expectations also cause many offenses to fly in our face. Does faith in Jesus mean we deserve our best life now? Have we risen above suffering compared to others in this world? Illness still slows us down, loss of a job will hurt, separation means loneliness, and death drags any into deep darkness. Even the sinful nature wants to eat us up from the inside with the stain of guilt. The Devil longs to wall us in with addictions to cope with the pain. Worst of all, misunderstanding about Jesus and baptism into Him brings doubt when suffering comes. Broken and despairing hearts of Christians ask like John, “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another? Many have run off “looking for another,” since it appears Jesus has overlooked their suffering. Distress over works, great loss, and agony in life easily put Christ at a distance from our life.

Yet, Jesus took no offense at John’s frank question. Instead of hiding or ignoring his disciples, at that very hour Jesus gave an answer. First it was with acts of healing and then with words of hope. He confirmed what John would have known from the Old Testament. That the Messiah would fulfill what the Scripture said. Judgment would come in due time, but this was a time of grace given by God’s Son. Jesus came to serve and not be served. He came to suffer and not glorify Himself. He came to sacrifice and not stand over sinners. This is the good news Jesus sent back to the greatest born among women. John had to look through the injustice of it all and his dismal situation. Since faith comes by hearing, John received words of light into his darkness of despair. Jesus removed the clouds of doubt and prepared the way for John to trust in Him. He made the end game known saying, “And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.”

When life breaks to pieces before our eyes or there are only questions, Jesus does not take offence. He answers us with great joy able to justify sinners filled with all kinds of doubt. To look for another savior is no solution. It is why St. Paul proclaims, “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.” This is not rejoicing as something we produce by our efforts or will. Instead, this rejoicing comes from God to us, God in our midst, God bound to the cross. Luther wonderfully puts it this way, “To be gloomy before God is not pleasing to Him, although He would permit us to be depressed before the world” (AE54:16). It is quite fine to confess the hardships, sufferings, and sadness we experience. Yet, this gloom dare not deflect us away from Jesus. He sends His Word and Sacraments to heal broken lives, remove doubting hearts, and comfort us with joy. To take offense means having our agony take center stage and not Jesus who is Savior of a sinful world.

John had the blessing to be still preparing the way of His Lord. His imprisonment and impending death was actually a witness to God’s greater plan. Every aspect of the baptizer prepared Christ finally to go the way of His cross. The crowd was to hear that if John was a reed unshaken by the wind. Jesus was the promised Savior unshaken to suffer and die for sinners. If John did not dress in soft clothes for he was a prophet. Jesus came wearing the clothes of His righteous as the only Son of God. If John was the greatest born of women for He prepared the way of the Lord. Jesus was born of the virgin being one with sinners in order to be the sinless sacrifice. Since Christ would be least by His cross, His kingdom was open for the most dismal sinners to be great by faith in Him. John had to reconcile his suffering and death with the better promise Jesus gave. It was not salvation by the Law, but faith in the Gospel even for John.

We have the blessing to know that God is in our midst. Faith is personal, but never a private. It is a proclamation that goes out to all and it comes from Jesus. Is He the one or will we look for another? When our expectations of God run head into what we experience in life. There can be a crisis of spiritual proportions. Doubt and despair seek to rule the day. Yet, you need not be born the greatest of women. Your righteousness is greater than the Law, greater than works of men, greater than life itself. It resides in Jesus who has given us a birth from baptism that has far more value. St. John declares, “For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world— our faith (1 John 5:4).” Do you hear what I hear? In all ways and at all times there is joy from the peace God gives. Since Jesus is the “Coming One,” blessed is any not offended by Him. Amen. Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting. Amen.

1. http://www.nytimes.com/2002/12/01/nyregion/noel-regney-songwriter-known-for-do-you-hear-what-i-hear-is-dead-at-80.html [↑](#footnote-ref-1)