

IK Synod Sermon  
12.11.2022  
Pastor Nancy Nyland  
Director for Evangelical Mission

Third Sunday in Advent  
Gospel Reading — Matthew 11:2-11

The Holy Gospel according to Matthew the 11<sup>th</sup> chapter.  
**Glory to you, O Lord.**

<sup>2</sup>When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples <sup>3</sup>and said to him, “Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?” <sup>4</sup>Jesus answered them, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: <sup>5</sup>the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. <sup>6</sup>And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me.”

<sup>7</sup>As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? <sup>8</sup>What then did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces. <sup>9</sup>What then 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, ‘See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.’ <sup>11</sup>Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

The Gospel of the Lord.  
**Praise to you, O Christ.**

Grace to you and peace from God, the Father, and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.

<sup>2</sup>When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples <sup>3</sup>and said to Jesus, “Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?”

John the Baptist – the voice of the one crying in the wilderness. John, calling people to repentance. John, confident, accusing, challenging, “You brood of vipers.” John, knowing that he was the forerunner of Jesus, the Messiah. John, who baptized many in the Jordan river. John, bold enough to baptize even this Messiah.

Now this John sits in prison, in a dark lonely cell and he wonders, he doubts, he questions, and he sends his disciples to ask Jesus what must have been a tough question to ask — “Are you really the one who is to come, or should we look for another?”

From last week's Gospel reading where we find John in the wilderness calling for repentance and confession, baptizing, proclaiming the kingdom of God, we have moved forward in time several months to our reading today. Now John, arrested, bound, imprisoned, has shifted from confidence to skepticism, from certainty to doubt, from clarity to confusion.

Can you relate? Have you experienced times in your life when you have been moving forward with purpose, living into your goals and plans and dreams and then all of a sudden you have been stopped short, arrested, bound — perhaps by cancer or another illness, by the death of a loved one or a broken relationship, by the loss of employment or betrayal by someone you trusted — or by any number of other things that cause us to slow momentum, stumble, lose our confidence and begin to doubt.

I have come to believe that doubt is not a lack of faith. In fact, often my doubt has strengthened my faith and brought me closer to God.

As I look back at my life there have been times when I have moved from optimism to pessimism or sarcasm, times when I have moved from confidence to uncertainty, from anticipation to disappointment, from hope to despair. Perhaps you have experienced those times, too.

Maybe you are even experiencing one of those times right now — struggling, trying to keep your head above water, feeling inadequate, grieving, feeling lost or alone.

Here we are on this third Sunday of Advent, Christmas celebrations lurking in the future. And for some of us, as we anticipate the birth of the Christ child and give thanks for this precious gift from God, as we rejoice that this babe, the Messiah will fulfill God's promises, bringing salvation to all, as Christmas cheer and carols and festivities surround us, we find that in the midst of this joy we experience sorrow and struggle and despair.

John asked Jesus if he was the Messiah, because John like the rest of the world at that time was expecting a Messiah who would be a powerful, all-conquering king who would defeat every enemy and restore Israel to its rightful place.

<sup>4</sup>Jesus answered John's disciples, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: <sup>5</sup>the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them.

This is the kind of Messiah that Jesus was and is. The one who brings healing and wholeness, resurrection and hope. The one who eats with sinners and mingles with outcasts. The one who brings good news to those in despair. The one who encourages John, as he sits in prison, to shift his thinking, his expectations of the Messiah by saying, "blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me."

Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us. The one who does not eliminate all our troubles but accompanies us through them. The one who holds onto us, who holds us together when the world seems to be falling apart. The one who enters into our sorrow, our grief, our struggles,

our loss, our despair, our hopelessness and reminds us that we are not alone. The one who promises that out of endings come new beginnings, out of death comes resurrection and new life.

Jesus answered John's disciples, "Go and tell John what you hear and see." And Jesus says the same to us today. Go and tell. Go and tell what you hear and see.

What do you hear, what do you see? How do you perceive God at work in the world? How do you experience God at work in your life? God is with us.....In the kindness of a stranger, in the coo of a newborn, in the love of newlyweds, in words of appreciation, in the silliness of a child, in the turning of the seasons, in the unexpected blessing, in the hospitality of a friend, in a faith community gathered, in the sharing of peace, in the prayers offered, in the bread broken, in the wine poured, in Emmanuel, God with us. Amen.

### **Prayers of Intercession**

As we prepare for the fullness of Christ's presence, let us pray for a world that yearns for new hope.

**A brief silence.**

Gracious God, we rejoice in the gifts of your Spirit. Equip the global church to magnify your love and peace in every land. We pray for the work of the Lutheran World Federation and ELCA Global Mission. God, in your mercy,

**hear our prayer.**

Abundant God, we rejoice in your creation. Revive lands we have squandered and depleted. Make gardens flourish in cities and neighborhoods. Cleanse polluted air and water so living things may breathe, drink, and praise you. God, in your mercy,

**hear our prayer.**

Righteous God, we rejoice in your justice. End racism and oppression. Deliver all who are unjustly imprisoned or persecuted. Reconcile nations and peoples in conflict (regions in turmoil may be named). Help us pray for our enemies. God, in your mercy,

**hear our prayer.**

Healing God, we rejoice in your compassion. Comfort any in distress because of worry, illness, or loss (especially). Strengthen and protect health care workers, rescue teams, crisis counselors, and all who risk themselves to keep others safe. God, in your mercy,

**hear our prayer.**

Abiding God, we rejoice in your company. Give us calm and patient hearts as we gather with family and friends. Keep us mindful of those for whom this season is not happy. Console the grieving and surround them with loving support. God, in your mercy,

**hear our prayer.**

**Here other intercessions may be offered.**

Faithful God, we rejoice with Mary, Mother of our Lord, and with all the saints, that your mercy endures for all generations. Look with favor on those who have died and lead us to joyfully sing of your everlasting promises. God, in your mercy,

**hear our prayer.**

God of our longing, you know our deepest needs. By your Spirit, gather our prayers and join them with the prayers of all your children. In Jesus' name we pray.

**Amen.**

Hear us now Father, as we pray the words that Christ has taught us,

**Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come,  
thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread;  
and forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us;  
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory,  
forever and ever. Amen.**

### **Blessing**

God the eternal Word,  
who dwells with us in Jesus,  
and who holds us in the grace of the Holy Spirit,  
✠ bless you now and forever.

**Amen.**

### **Dismissal**

Go in peace. Christ is near.

**Thanks be to God.**

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