

3 S. in Advent 12/13/15
Luke 7:18-28 C

“ARE YOU THE ONE WHO IS TO COME, OR SHALL WE LOOK FOR ANOTHER?”

Will our nation suffer another terrorist attack? Is it safe for me to eat out or will I get E. Coli? Will I get the flu, or cancer, or Alzheimer's?

We live in a world of uncertainty. And life in a world of uncertainty causes us to doubt, just it led John's disciples to doubt.

John, as we heard last week, was the voice crying in the wilderness, preparing the way of the Lord. Now, John was in prison for rebuking King Herod for taking his brother's wife. In all likelihood, he knew he would soon die. In the weakness of their mortal flesh, John's disciples were struggling under the weight of the cross. They were trying to understand how the promise of God that the Messiah would “proclaim freedom for the prisoners and ... to release the oppressed,” could be true if John were still imprisoned. John's disciples were doubting if Jesus really was the promised Messiah or if they should look for another.

[PAUSE] Just like you and me. We are not be in prison for our faith, but, on this side of heaven, we are imprisoned by uncertainty, worry, fear, and ... we doubt: Is Jesus really there for me, or should we look for another or something else?

You've heard the promise, “I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you a also may be where I am.” But, you wonder, “is there really a heaven?” Maybe its just one big fairy tale.

“Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.” Yet, your reason and senses tell you, maybe, just maybe,

there isn't even a god after all. Maybe its just a bunch of fantasy.

If my spouse is supposed to my helpmate, why does he/she hurt me, by their words and deeds? Why do people commit crimes against us, stealing and vandalizing our property? Why do people use their wagging tongues to tell lies about us and destroy our good name? If we are to love each other, why is there so much hate?

Saints of Concordia, that pink candle burns on our Advent wreath this Sunday. Today, is Gaudete Sunday. "Gaudete" means "rejoice". This Sunday reminds us that our coming Savior turns our sorrow to joy, and gives us reason to rejoice.

This season of Advent teaches us that Jesus is our Coming Savior. At His birth, He came to serve, to seek, to save lost, sinful humanity. But, that's not exactly the kind of Savior the Israelites were looking for. Like John's disciples, they expected the Messiah to come in wrath to execute vengeance upon their Roman conquerors and drive them from their homeland. The Romans still occupied Israel and now John was imprisoned, facing certain execution, so they begin to wonder, is Jesus the Messiah or should they look for another?

We have our own ideas of what kind of Savior Jesus should be for us. He's supposed to make us healthy, wealthy, and wise. He's supposed to smite down our enemies, especially those who annoy us. Suffering? Tears? We don't want those, so Jesus is to see to it that every day is a happy day on the yellow brick road.

We must ever remember that His first coming was not as the Almighty Judge to judge the living and the dead, to once and for all separate our earthly lives from the curse of sin. His first Coming was to absorb God's wrath against sin. This He did in His own body.

Even though He was very God of very God, Jesus took on a true human body and soul and was born of the Virgin Mary, born in a cattle stable. In the course of His earthly life, He endured poverty, contempt, rejection, suffered great agony of body and soul under Pontius Pilate, and finally gave up His soul in death upon the cross. This He did so that you and I would be forgiven and forever free from the curse of sin, death, and the grave.

When John's disciples were sent to Jesus, He answered John's question with the words of Isaiah the Prophet,

"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. And blessed is the one who is not offended by Me (Lk 7)."

In the course of His earthly life, Jesus did perform miracles, as the Old Testament said He would. He did miracles to prove that He was God, because only God can do miracles.

And, His miracles did one other thing -- they removed the curse of sin from people's lives. Yet, the blind who received their sight, the lame who walked, the lepers who were cleansed, the deaf who heard, the dead who were raised up, the poor who heard the good news of the Gospel still had to live this world of sin and death. They still had to endure the hardships and toils of this present age. The miracles that Jesus performed on them, removing that curse of sin from their lives, was, as we say in our liturgy, only a "foretaste of the feast to come." Those miracles were only a foretaste of what heaven will be like, when our lives will be forever free from the curse of sin and God will wipe all the tears from our eyes.

But, for today, we must walk by faith in the promises of God, always remembering that one promise of Jesus, "In this world you will have

trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

Just like the Israelites to whom the words of our Old Testament lesson were addressed. They were in captivity in Babylon. God through the Prophet Zephaniah speaks to them, *“Sing aloud, shout!...Rejoice and exult with all your heart...The King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst; and you shall never again fear evil...The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save.”* God assures them that, even in the midst of their troubles, they have reason to sing and rejoice. He is with them, He will turn their sorrow into joy and do away with all the threatening perils of sin that confront them.

Like the Israelites of old, we sing and rejoice because our Lord Christ is with us. The fourth chapter of Hebrews reads,

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Our high priest, Jesus, sympathizes with us in our weaknesses. Literally, that means He becomes one with us, knowing and understanding our sorrows, heartaches, and tears. He is with us, to comfort us, to strengthen our feeble knees, to wipe the tears from our eyes. In a very literally way, Jesus has already carried those sorrows. He had all the iniquities of all the world, and all the sorrows that came with those iniquities, laid upon Him and carried them to the cross for you and for me.

But as we bear our cross, the father of all lies come to destroy our faith in Jesus, "Is God with you? Does He care for you? Does God love you?"

When we are tempted to doubt God's promises and presence, God

Himself instructs us, "Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." With confidence we go to our Mighty Fortress to find grace to help in time of need. In baptism, we are given Christ's victory over sin, death, and all heartache, tragedy, and sorrow to be our very own. As we hear His Word and eat and drink His Body and Blood, He gives us grace to keep us strong in that faith He began at our baptism. We are not alone. Christ is Emmanuel, God with us, to turn our sorrow to joy.

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice! Amen.