

3 S. in Advent 12/16/18
St. Luke 7:18-28 C

TEXT: IS THE APPOINTED GOSPEL FOR THIS SUNDAY, FROM 7th CHAPTER OF LUKE'S GOSPEL

Today is Gaudete Sunday – the Sunday of rejoicing – the Sunday of the rose candle. “Rejoice in the Lord always,” Paul says, “again I will say, rejoice” (Ph 4:4). For better, for worse; for richer, for poorer; in sickness and in health, as long as you shall live, Rejoice in the Lord ALWAYS!.

You don't need to be anxious. You don't need to be worried. You don't need to be afraid in this world of sin. But, honestly, we are.

All the uncertainty and anxiety in this present age caused John's disciples to doubt. 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 with doubt. John's disciples were doubting if Jesus really was the promised Messiah or if they should look for another.

Much 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?

Doubts rise from unmet expectations. The disciples of John had doubts because they thought, they believed, the Messiah was going to come with the wrath of God. He was going to punish the enemies of God and God's people. He was going to drive those hated Romans out of their land. But, instead He comes in solidarity with sinners, eating and drinking with tax collectors and prostitutes.

Unmet expectations? Especially about God and His love, and His work and His ways? Have those unmet expectations caused you to doubt?

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.

When God does not meet our expectations, when He doesn't do things our way, we doubt. Yes, the children of Israel had expectations of what the Messiah would be and what He would do, when God came in the flesh, He showed Himself to be the Messiah of mercy, compassion, and forgiveness.

Even though He was very God of very God, Jesus humbled Himself to be born of a Virgin in a cattle stable. And He took upon Himself, upon His own body, all of our doubt, our anxiety, our worry, our fear; all of our sin. And He carried them to the cross, there to give up His soul into death. This He did to be the atoning sacrifice for the sin of the world, so that you 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. As God in the flesh, He did miracles to prove that He was God and to remove the curse of sin from people's lives.

The blind received their sight, the lame walked, the lepers were cleansed, the deaf heard, the dead were raised, the poor heard the good news of the Gospel. These miracles were, as we sing in our liturgy, a “foretaste of the feast to come”. In doing these miracles, Jesus was giving us 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. How we long for that!

We are free and forgiven in Christ. We are His children. Yet, in the weakness of our human flesh, we doubt. We doubt God’s love and care, and find ourselves imprisoned by uncertainty, worry, and fear.

Just like the Israelites to whom the words of our Old Testament lesson were addressed. The temple in Jerusalem had been leveled to the ground. They were exiled from their homeland, enslaved to the cruel, ruthless Babylonians. God spoke to them through the Prophet,

Fear not, O Zion;
 let not your hands grow weak.
 The LORD your God is in your midst,
 a mighty one who will save;
 he will rejoice over you with gladness;
 he will quiet you by his love;
 He will exult over you with loud singing (Zeph. 3:16b-17).

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 doubt to joy and there is no reason for them to fear.

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 (vv. 15-16).

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 limp hands, 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 our 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 Christ has done for Hollyn this very day. 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, so we can rejoice ALWAYS!