

3 S. in Advent 12/15/24  
 Luke 7:18-28 C

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

*“They will not believe me or listen to my voice, for they will say, ‘The Lord did not appear to you’” (Ex 4:1).* Those were Moses’ words to God. God had just appeared to him in the burning bush to tell him He would send him to Pharaoh to bring God’s children out of Egypt. But, it seems our friend Moses did not exactly have faith in God’s Word.

*“I have been very jealous for the LORD, the God of hosts...and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life to take it away” (1 Ki 19:10).* Those were Elijah’s words to God. The Lord God had just consumed the false prophets of Baal. He had made it rain upon the land. What did our friend Elijah do? No, he didn’t fear, love, and trust in God above all things. He feared ruthless Jezebel and doubted and ran away.

Oh, and our friend Thomas. In fact, you know him as ... DOUBTING Thomas. The risen Jesus appears to the disciples, Thomas not being there, and tell him *“We have seen the Lord.”* And Thomas says, *“Unless I see in His hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into His side, I will never believe” (Jn 20:25).*

Life in the darkness of the valley of the shadow of death causes us to DOUBT, like Moses, Elijah, Thomas, and John’s disciples.

Saints of God, the pink candle burning this morning reminds us that this is “rejoice” Sunday. This Sunday COMFORTS US THAT OUR COMING SAVIOR TURNS OUR SORROW TO JOY, AND GIVES US REASON TO REJOICE.

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 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.

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 or someone better?

You've heard the promise of Jesus Himself, "*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 also may be where I am*" (Jn 14:3). But, you doubt, "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*, the Bible says (Pr 3:5). 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 anger and hate in the world and in our lives?

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 and drive the hated Romans out of their homeland. But, the Romans still occupied Israel and now John was imprisoned, facing certain execution, so they begin to doubt: 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 that. Jesus is to make 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. Because He did that, you and I are forgiven and forever free from the curse of sin, death, and the grave.

Our midweek Advent services have focused on the Theme, "Rejoice: The Lord Is at Hand." My Friends, we can rejoice just the Israelites to whom the words of our Old Testament lesson were addressed. "*Sing aloud, shout! ... Rejoice and exult with all your heart,*" God says to them

through Zephaniah. And then our kind, merciful, loving Lord God tells them WHY, why they sing and rejoice, “*The Lord has taken away the judgments against you ... The Lord your God is in your midst.*” God has taken away, forgiven, all their sin and He is with them, to turn their sorrow to joy.

Like the Israelites of old, we sing and rejoice because our Lord Christ is with us, to the very end of the earth itself. The 4<sup>th</sup> 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.*

Jesus, sympathizes with us in our weaknesses. Literally, that means He becomes one with us, knowing and understanding our sorrows, our skinned knees, our 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!*

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.