

Without A Doubt

3rd Sun. in Advent – 12/11/21 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Luke 7:18-35 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 19, [John the Baptizer sent his followers to Jesus to ask Him this question (translated directly from the Greek),] **“Are You the Coming One or should we anxiously wait for another”**.

Introduction

✘ One Christian once asked another Christian, “Do you ever have doubts about God?” You would think that question should be easy to answer, because all Christians; all people have doubts from time to time. But the question becomes more difficult because of fear. It’s understandable that you might fear that your doubts will harm your faith or bring anger from the Lord because of them, or worse possibly lead you or someone you love away from salvation.

→ And yet, what is ironic about that Christian asking if the other believer has doubts about God, is that he would not even ask the question in the first place if he wasn’t facing some kind of doubts of his own to begin with.

✘ So have you ever had any doubts about God; about your Christian faith? Likely you have. If so, today’s Gospel Reading is one for you, because here we learn about God’s prophet, John the Baptizer – sent to prepare the way for the coming of God’s Son who has doubts while he is languishing in prison.

→ In verse 28 Jesus says that “among those born of women none is greater than John”. Yet our text begins with John sending some of His followers to Jesus to try and alleviate what must have been a growing doubt that he struggled with. So if John is doubting his expectations of Jesus, who are we to think we are above that possibility today?

I. What John thought he knew about Jesus.

✘ As we read God’s Word and learn about John, he comes onto the scene in the wilderness and appears to be quite confident about Jesus. He knew his job was to prepare the way for the Christ; to call sinners to repentance so that there would be no doubt that all people everywhere needed the coming Messiah in order to be saved.

→ To that end, John proclaimed Jesus as the promised Christ. In John 1:29-30 John pointed Jesus out to the people and said directly, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is He of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks before me, because He was before me’.”

→ John even baptized Jesus in the Jordan River. He heard God’s voice from heaven declare, “This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased” (Mat. 3:17). He saw the Spirit of God descend like a dove and rest upon Jesus (Mat. 3:16).

✘ So what has happened between then and now where we find John in our text today? John has been through quite a lot. As God’s bold proclaimer of the truth, John was not intimidated by the established authorities of his day. He didn’t hesitate to call the leaders in the Jewish church – the Pharisees, Scribes and Sadducees – to account for the many ways they were perverting God’s Word and leading people to think salvation came by man’s works rather than God’s grace.

→ He even had the courage to rebuke King Herod in public for committing adultery with his brother’s wife Herodius. The secular historians tell us that Herod had an affair with Herodius while they were both away on a trip in Rome. Their fling had such an impact that Herod divorced his wife as soon as he returned home. Herodius likewise left her husband and the two

were then married. This was of course unacceptable in God's eyes and so John publicly denounced Herod and Herodius for their sin.

→ The Jewish historian Flavius Josephus tells us that John was then imprisoned by Herod in the palace of Macherus (Antiquities of the Jews, XVIII, V, 2), also called "The Black Fortress". We're not sure exactly how long he had been in prison by the time of today's text, but it had likely been around a year to a year and a half.

→ During that time Herod was afraid to execute John because he actually liked to hear John preach God's Word. Yet he still could not be seen as soft. So John knew that his future on earth was short.

II. John begins to have doubts.

⊗ During this time Jesus' ministry was in full swing and John was beginning to hear accounts of Jesus' teaching and miraculous healings. Most recently Jesus healed a Centurion's servant from a distance and raised a widow's son from the dead.

→ Now John's expectations about Jesus are beginning to make him doubt everything ... about his boldness in calling Herod and others to repent; about whether or not Jesus really was the promised Messiah.

→ Likely John thought, along with most believers in his day, that Jesus was supposed to come and bring judgment against everyone who was against God's people. Well, John spoke up against Herod, who rejected Jesus. So, he must have thought, "Why am I still in prison?" "When is Jesus going to start the kingdom of God and release me from this jail?"

⊗ Yet all that John is hearing about Jesus is that He is teaching about love and forgiveness. He's performing only works of compassion and mercy. This didn't seem to make sense to John. Had he wasted all of his time and even put his life at risk for a guy who wasn't really the promised Messiah? It appears he's very disappointed with what he sees from Jesus.

→ So John sends two of his followers to Jesus to ask a straight forward question, "Are you the Coming One, or should we anxiously wait for another?" (v.19) That phrase, "the Coming One" was a title used in the Old Testament for the promised Messiah. Psalm 118:26 says in the Greek version of the Old Testament, "Blessed is the Coming One in the name of the Lord...".

→ So John's faulty expectations led him to wonder, is Jesus really the Son of God; the Savior of the world or not?

⊗ You and I live in a time of great disappointment today, don't we? World and government leaders, economic stability, questions about whether or not we can truly trust even our friends and family anymore because now they've shown that they don't have the same priorities and beliefs and world view as we do.

→ Which means that yes, the disease of disappointment and doubt has spread even into the Church of Christ, so that what was once a place of confidence and trust now finds life-long believers doubting their faith in staggering numbers.

→ When this happens, we have to ask the same question that needed to be asked of John. Is the problem with Jesus? Or Jesus' Word when it is faithfully taught? Or is the problem with John's faulty expectations of Jesus? Is the problem with our faulty expectations of Jesus and His Word?

→ Are we doubting Him because we are the ones who are expecting Him to change His teaching and His purpose to meet the expectations and beliefs that have changed in our world; to change His unchanging truth just so that we can believe what is popular in our world today;

what will make life “easier” and “more convenient” for us rather than actually address our sin and grant us the forgiveness and salvation that we need?

- ✘ So think about the core issue(s) behind your doubts friends. Is it something where you are expecting Jesus to approve of your desires, to follow your agenda? Is it something that I want Jesus to do, just because it will make this life easier for me, but deny the reality that I am a sinner living in a sin-filled world?

→ These kinds of unfair expectations can certainly cause us to doubt or question Jesus just as they did with John the Baptizer.

III. John looks to Jesus to resolve his doubts.

- ✘ This then is where we learn the most important lesson from John today ... and of course from Jesus as well.

→ It's very common that when Christians begin to have doubts they respond in a manner that actually makes things worse rather than better. Whatever the age – whether it's someone in high school or college or as a young adult or even later on in life, those who struggle with growing doubts regarding their Christian faith, typically begin to turn away from Jesus “in order to try and figure things out”. They stop attending church; they lose contact with their Christian brothers and sisters; they no longer read or think about what the Bible says.

→ But think about that approach for a moment. If I have questions about any other topic, let's say it's about why my car isn't working right or why I'm having trouble with something connected to my body and my health. Does it make sense to distance myself from those who know the most about cars or matters of my medical well-being? Of course not! We make an appointment and get our car into a mechanic, or talk with someone who is a mechanic, right? We engage with our doctor and undergo medical tests to try and figure out why we're having the trouble we're having.

- ✘ Likewise John, when he has doubts about Jesus, takes his doubts to the source; to Jesus. The old favorite hymn, “*What a Friend We Have in Jesus*” gives us great guidance when it asks, “Have we trial and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere? We should never be discouraged – take it to the Lord in prayer. Can we find a friend so faithful? Who will all our sorrows share? Jesus knows our every weakness – take it to the Lord in prayer” (LSB #770, v.2).

→ John sent his followers directly to Jesus with his doubts. “Are you the Coming One?” And notice, Jesus doesn't respond by rebuking John. He doesn't condemn him for asking the question. Instead Jesus points to all the people He has healed both physically and spiritually by removing the evil spirits that were controlling them.

→ Jesus loving explains that He is doing exactly what the Scriptures have said all along that the Messiah was supposed to come and do. Verse 22, “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”.

- ✘ Jesus closes His response with a blessing, a personal and direct assurance at the same time that it encourages John and the rest of us about where we must always have our focus. He says directly from the Greek, “Blessed is the one who is not scandalized by Me” (v.23).

→ That's so very important, because people in our world today are so easily offended and scandalized by so many things, including Jesus! And most of the time it's because our expectations are not consistent or fair.

- ✘ Verses 31-35 talk about how the people in their day were acting in the same childish manner that we often act regarding Jesus today. They demanded that John and Jesus perform like

dancing puppets on a string. Verse 32 – If we play a flute we expect you to dance a jig. If we play a dirge we expect you to weep and grieve.

→ Today it might sound more like this: “If I go out on the town for a night of fun, I expect Jesus to forgive me the next morning, but when she goes out and does something wrong, she should be condemned in public with no mercy at all.” Or, “this current hot topic in society right now of _____ is one of my passions because I have friends who do it or believe it. So because it's important to me, then I can't accept a Jesus who has said for centuries that living or acting that way is not in line with His design for His people. I reject that Jesus.”

⊗ Still Jesus loving yet clearly responded to John's primary question in verse 27 referring to Malachi 3:1 that prophesied about John's purpose of coming to prepare the way for the Messiah.

→ He assures John that his time spent preaching and calling people to repentance has not been in vain. Yes, Jesus is the One sent from God as our Savior! Jesus has fulfilled and Jesus was fulfilling everything that God laid out and expected of His Son.

→ He was born of a woman, having the same flesh as sinners and became least in the Kingdom while He hung nailed to the cross. Why? to make sinners the greatest in the Kingdom by granting them His righteousness through forgiveness and faith.

⊗ Yes, friends, today Jesus is still the one that you and I can look to for assurance in all our doubts. So take your doubts to Him; take your sins and struggles to Him in repentance and faith and prayer, because He is the only One who has answered them with His own saving work. He's the only one that can bring our expectations and His purpose back into alignment with God's perfect will and plan for our salvation.

Conclusion

⊗ Did John finally come to terms with his questions and doubts? I think we can safely say, “Yes” because his faith was searching for answers in the right place; with the right person. He took His God-problem to God Himself, and Jesus, the Son of God gave him Himself as the One Who Came to bring salvation to all the people of the world.

→ Now Jesus comes to you and me today. And as Jesus said, “Blessed is the one who is not offended by Me” (v. 23). Amen.