

December 11, 2022

Luke 7:18-28

HE WILL BRING US . . .

“The Answers!”

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The word “*doubt*” isn’t used in our gospel lesson. But John the Baptist was riddled with *doubt* about Jesus. This is both stunning and comforting at the same time. It is stunning because of what John witnessed at the baptism of Jesus. It is strangely comforting because it shows that even the strongest of God’s children have moments of confusion and doubt. Our walk with God is not a perfectly smooth road. We are crippled with sin even when we are strong children of God. It can easily distort our relationship with our Savior. It can also eventually lead to a loss of faith and we need to take that seriously.

Just look at this amazing contrast. First, absorb these words of John himself after the Baptism of Jesus: “I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God (John. 1:32-34).” Now, with those words in mind, we move forward in time to consider the words of our gospel lesson: “The disciples of John reported all these things to him [most likely the things that had happened since the beginning of Jesus’ Galilean ministry]. And John, calling two of his disciples to him, sent them to the Lord, saying, ‘Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?’”

The progress or manner of Jesus’ ministry was not what John the Baptist had expected. A careful consideration of this section, along with other portions of Scripture, lead us to conclude that John was looking for the Messiah to not only come in mercy and forgiveness, but also in wrath to execute vengeance upon those who were considered to be the enemies of God and Israel. John was unable to see a gap in time between the first coming of Jesus to save and his second coming to judge the wicked. This misunderstanding had turned into doubt and was becoming a danger to his faith. John the Baptist needed an answer.

What is doubt? Doubt is where one is saying “*yes and no*” at the same time. Consequently, it creates a very uncomfortable situation in a person’s soul. If the issue that is being doubted is very important to the individual, the greater the tension or panic that will result. We experience doubt not because it naturally belongs to faith, but because faith can be malformed or malnourished.

It is then vital that when we doubt we cry out to the only one who can help. It is important for us to seek resolution to all doubt in Jesus. Consequently, doubt should be recognized by us as a symptom of something wrong with our faith that needs to be corrected. And if we do not feel a great enough tension to drive us to correct it, we should see the symptom itself, regardless of the degree, as sufficient for us to deal with as soon as possible before it destroys our faith - before Jesus becomes an offense to us.

John was suffering from a faulty picture of Jesus. It can easily happen to any one of us. This interferes with our relationship with Jesus and causes a lack of trust. We end up functioning on wrong assumptions and, when things happen in our lives, we are unable to recognize Jesus for who he really is. And so we become suspicious of him and start to have thoughts about him that question who he is and his loving heart. We start to doubt and even distrust him. This is all due to a deficiency in our understanding. That’s why it so important to grow in our understanding of the person and work of Christ through Scripture.

We need answers that correctly form and nourish our understanding of who Jesus is and his will for us, so that we do not walk away from faith in bitter anguish with the conviction that our Savior is a failure. There is always the danger that we become offended with Jesus. In our text for today, John is doing exactly what we should do in similar circumstances. We are told that he sent his disciples to ask a question. As I said a moment ago, it is vital that when we doubt we cry out to the only one who can help and truly answer. It is important for us to seek resolution to all doubt in Jesus. So, John the Baptist and his disciples have not lost their faith, and neither do we when we go through similar moments, but we perceive the real danger so that we look to Jesus for help. And HE WILL BRING US ... **The Answers!** Our lesson continues:

And when the men had come to him, they said, “John the Baptist has sent us to you, saying, ‘Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?’” In that hour he healed many people of diseases and plagues and evil spirits, and on many who were blind he bestowed sight. And he answered them, “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.”

John’s question about Jesus’ identity, “Are you the one who is to come ...?” is crucial for every human being. And Jesus’ response is very interesting. In that hour, he sets forth actions that prove his identity. If you look carefully at the words of Jesus you will notice that he is referring to prophecies from the book of Isaiah. The prophet had said that the Savior of the world would do certain things. Jesus did them right before the eyes of John’s disciples, and then answers their question by commanding them to go and tell John what they have seen and heard. The actions of Jesus have fulfilled the Scripture. By this they are to know and believe that he is the one to come. They are bid to trust that he will ultimately fulfill all things.

Notice that Jesus does not directly say when he will execute his wrath. John and the disciples are left to trust this without any further explanation on the basis of what has already been fulfilled. A person then is truly blessed when he or she is able to cling to what has been given, while waiting for the Savior to fulfill the rest. And we experience this in our own lives to this day as we also wait for the second coming. As we wait, we have Jesus before us in the means of grace doing his works. And he will one day come to judge the living and the dead. We are blessed when we are not offended at how long it is taking for him to return.

For now, we are invited to rejoice that he has taken away the dread of the last day through his sufferings and death and empty tomb! Regardless of how wicked our culture has become, we live in a day that is better than John’s day as we live with the full record of the life and times of Jesus the Messiah. Jesus brings to us **The Answers!** The prophecies of old are still before us along with the full record of their fulfillment. And we are invited to know and believe that if Jesus came into this world and suffered and died the first time, he will certainly come back and take us to be with him forever.

We have the eye witness testimony of our Savior’s saving work! Jesus was conceived and born and lived a full human life in our stead. He was baptized to become sin for us that waters might become a

cleansing flood that washes away each and everyone of our sins. On the cross, Jesus received the punishment that we deserve for our doubts and all other sins that attempt to undermine and destroy faith. And by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus proves that we are truly forgiven, and that he will also raise us up on the last day to be with him in a new heaven and earth. And, whenever we might question his love for us, he visits us with his body and blood in the Sacrament of the Altar to say, "I love and forgive you." The apostle Peter writes: "... we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts ... (2 Pet. 1:19)." Indeed! **The Answers** are before us!

During this Advent season of penitential preparation, we consider our doubts and other sins. How wonderful it is, then, to learn that in Jesus we have all the signs of God's fulfilled promises. We have the signs of His miracles and His teaching, but especially we have the sign of His crucifixion and resurrection that earn forgiveness for our sins and give us the promise of life everlasting in His gracious presence.

Today is the Third Sunday in Advent. This day is historically characterized by a note of Joy during the otherwise heavier admonitions to repent and get ready for the end. This joy anticipates the birth of Jesus and looks forward to, with delight, his return at the end. The symbolism of the pink or rose candle on the Advent wreath furthers this message of Joy. And we have every reason to rejoice!

We rejoice that by his resurrection he has opened heaven for us. We rejoice that, although our sins are great, our Savior is even greater. We rejoice in the way he came to conquer sin. We rejoice in the way he now comes to offer forgiveness to all people. We rejoice in the way he will come to give eternal life to all who believe in him. We rejoice that a day is coming when Jesus will remove all doubt and quiet us with his love!

Amen