

December 14, 2025

Matthew 11:2-15

“Waiting Without Wondering”

Pilgrim Lutheran Church
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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In our gospel lesson John the Baptist sits in a prison cell. The wilderness preacher who once publicly thundered, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!” now hears only the echo of his own thoughts in the face of cold stone walls. His hands, once free to baptize, are no longer free. His voice, once heard by crowds of people, has been contained by Herod’s prison. His prophetic ministry is now coming to a close. And in that stillness, a question arises regarding Jesus: “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?”

This is not the question we expect from John. He had seen the heavens open at Jesus’ baptism. He had heard the voice of the Father. He had pointed to Jesus and declared, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” Yet now, in the darkness of waiting, he wonders. He doubts. Waiting often does that to us. It gives space for questions to grow. It tests the heart and makes us wrestle with what we thought we knew, but are now questioning.

John the Baptist was hit with doubt. He was not seeing the prophetic reality of gaps in time between Christ’s work of salvation and the day of judgment. Doubt is not uncommon to the Christian. It doesn’t mean that we have lost our faith. Rather, it can happen that we find ourselves in two minds about something. Doubts may threaten faith, but they do not automatically destroy it. In fact, if one runs to Jesus and his Word, it may end up being faith strengthening. Nevertheless, it creates a very uncomfortable situation in our inner being. If the issue that is being doubted is very important, the greater the tension and panic that will result. So, it is vital to deal with doubt so that one does not destroy faith.

John’s doubt was from a faulty understanding of God. In everyday life, we carry around with us in our minds what we think we know. When this knowledge is confirmed, then we are strengthened. But, when we discover that our understanding is wrong, flawed, or incomplete, it can cause us a lot of trouble and even destroy relationships. It can happen that we discover that, in fact, we have a faulty picture of God. If the need to understand is not sufficiently satisfied with truth, the doubt can be devastating to our trust in God. Our trust in God is shaped by our awareness of who God is, all that he has done for us, and his will for us, as it has been revealed in Scripture. Our faith in God is dependent upon the truth, that is, correctly knowing who God is and his revealed will for us.

The example of John the Baptist is very helpful to us when we find ourselves in two minds. John confronts his doubt by sending his disciples to ask Jesus for the truth. We should run to Jesus in the Bible. These moments can really test our trust in God, but he can use these moments for great strengthening. It is not uncommon in the Scripture for his people to ask him questions. And sometimes the waiting can be long. In those moments, God is teaching us to trust without having the answers immediately. Here is truly waiting without wondering - all rooted in the faithfulness of Jesus at the cross.

When John sends his disciples to ask the question, you might have noticed that Jesus does not scold them or say: “How dare you doubt me?” That’s because they are seeking the answers from where the answers are given, and where strength is also given when answers are long in coming. Instead of scolding

them, he answers them saying, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.” These words are based on the book of Isaiah and what the prophet had predicated about the coming Savior. So, Jesus appeals to his works and the Old Testament promises to prove to John and his disciples that he really is the Christ.

What we learn from this section is that the cure for a wrong, faulty, or incomplete picture of God that causes us to be in two minds, is only corrected by accurately knowing who God is and his will for us as revealed in the Bible. Thus, it is vital for us to hear the preaching and teaching of the Scripture. If we content ourselves with anything less, we can only expect to be plagued by doubt and the potential destruction that goes with it. May we let God be God and throw away all that distorts what we know about him in the life, sufferings, death, and resurrection of his Son Jesus Christ!

When we are waiting and wondering we can only come to a state of waiting without wondering when we are trusting in God and looking to him for resolution. You will note that Jesus adds a challenging word when he says, “blessed is the one who is not offended by me.” John the Baptist expected the Messiah to bring swift judgment - to lay the axe to the root of trees, to burn the chaff with unquenchable fire. Instead, for a time before those things will come, Jesus, for now, brings mercy, healing, and hope. We too may expect God to act in certain ways and at certain times. Maybe we want him to act quickly, dramatically, according to our expectation and our own timetables, but God’s ways are higher than our ways. His ways take into consideration our salvation and the salvation of all his people. Consequently, his plan may be slower, gentler, and more patient than what we would want.

You see, to not take offense means to trust in God through his Son Jesus Christ even when his ways are hard for us to accept or bear. As it says in Proverbs 3:5-8, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord, and turn away from evil. It will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones.” It is here that we are then able to be waiting without wondering. The fear of the Lord is to believe in the cross and empty tomb of Jesus. It means to have the forgiveness of sins and the desire to turn away from all evil, including those times when we are in two minds. The gift of the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation are able to keep us going when we are struggling with many things.

In fact, whatever it is that we go through as children of God, we can be certain that these things are for good results in our knowledge of God and our destination to be with him forever. In other words, God is always working for our blessed end, which is to leave this world behind and be with him forever in a new creation. The problem is that often in these things we don’t necessarily see as we ought.

There was once a farmer who planted a grove of Chinese bamboo. He watered it faithfully every day, tended the soil, and kept the weeds away. After the first year - nothing. The second year - still nothing. The third year - not even a sprout. By the fourth year, neighbors began to whisper, “He’s wasting his time.” But the farmer kept watering. Then, in the fifth year, something incredible happened. Within just six weeks, the bamboo shot up over 80 feet tall. You see, the bamboo had been growing all along, but

underground. It takes a lot of time to develop a root system before it finally breaks through the ground. And the lesson from this? Waiting isn't wasted time. And in the cross of Jesus we can wait without wondering. God is often working in even the waiting, or we might say, working beneath the surface, strengthening your roots and preparing you for sudden and powerful growth. Just because you cannot see the progress doesn't mean that he isn't doing his work.

We see that John the Baptist's whole ministry was serving to strengthen his faith to prepare him for the moment when he would be executed. Jesus turns to the crowd and says: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind?" Not at all. He was the prophet that was sent ahead of the Savior, and his question to Jesus through his disciples is even designed to make the reed even stronger! And this is what the Lord does for us in similar and different ways. Thus, Jesus is understood by us as all the more righteous and real when we wrestle and accept his teachings as they are. Jesus finds us as his disciples who receive him gladly, who are a work in progress, instructed and made certain in the way of salvation by grace!

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott