

Third Sunday in Advent
December 12, 2010
Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

Matthew 11:2-6

When John heard in prison what Christ was doing, he sent his disciples to ask him, "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?" Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me." (NIV)

Advent is a season often filled with expectations. What are your expectations this Christmas? The kids most likely are expecting stuffed stockings and gifts under the tree. Perhaps they are even expecting a specific gift this year. Maybe our children are expecting some quality time with mom and dad over Christmas break, or a chance to play in some snow. We adults also want and even expect certain things. Maybe we expect some time off to relax and enjoy some good holiday cheer. Perhaps we expect family to visit us, our children to come home for the holidays. Some of us may expect to hear from friends and get the annual update through another Christmas card.

But what happens when things don't turn out the way we expect? What happens when we have high expectations and we are let down? Perhaps the gift we wanted was too far out of mom and dad's price range, or we didn't get the time off we wanted, or the family doesn't come home like we expected. Are we disappointed? Do we become skeptical, filled with doubt, or just decide from now on it would be better to just lower our expectations? Do our expectations at times rob us from some of the joy and peace of Christmas? What can and should we expect? I pray our lesson today will help us with all of the above as we hear God's Word and talk about: **Christmas Expectations.**

God sent John the Baptist to prepare the way for the expectation of all expectations. The long awaited Savior was the expectation God's people longed for, for so many years. John spoke to the people of Christ's coming. John boldly told others concerning Christ: ***"He must become greater; I must become less"*** (John 3) John preached: ***"After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie"*** (Mark 1) Now, John clearly pointed all to Jesus as this long-expected Savior.

That's why many people are troubled by the words of our text. ***"When John heard in prison what Christ was doing, he sent his disciples to ask him, "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?"*** There are Bible scholars who say John is doing this, not for his own sake but, only for the sake of his disciples. They say John wants his disciples to be reassured while he is in prison. After all, how could doubts plague the man who did not hesitate to point to Jesus as the Lamb of God? How could there be an ounce of uncertainty in the forerunner who witnessed the Spirit of God come down from heaven and remain on Jesus? How could the prophet of God who confessed ***"I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God"*** (John 1) expect anything or anyone else?

Yet, before we just dismiss that such doubts could come from John look at the circumstances. John had rebuked king Herod for taking his brother's wife and for other sins and, because of it, Herod locked John up in prison. Then John began to hear about all the things Jesus was doing as the Christ. John had preached about an ax at the root of the trees and a winnowing fork in His hand and how he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire. But now Jesus came and what is the Christ doing? He is reaching out to seek and save the lost, calling out in love to everyone with a message of mercy. The Christ is busy healing and forgiving.

Jesus is drawing great crowds to Himself and all the while John, Jesus' own cousin, sits there in prison. Wasn't the Messiah to be one to free the prisoners from captivity and release those who sit in darkness? Couldn't the Christ start with his own relative? And where was this judgment God had John proclaim? Where was the kingdom of God which was near? Isn't it possible that even John the Baptist could be filled with some doubt? Like Elijah, to whom the Scriptures compare John the Baptist, isn't John also a sinful human being with his own weakness and frailties? Like Elijah might he be questioning his ministry? Perhaps the Baptist had some wrong expectations? Why couldn't it be John himself questioning now: "***Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?***"

If God's great prophet John the Baptist had a heart filled with disappointment and doubt, do we really think that Satan will not be able to put those same kind of thoughts into our hearts? What doubts and fears are in your hearts this Christmas season? We might not be locked up in a prison, but our own troubles and hardships can leave us with questions, can't they? What are our Christmas expectations? What do we want from God this Christmas? Are we discouraged with what we see and hear? Are we not satisfied with what we have in Jesus?

Whatever doubts John the Baptist or his disciples were dealing with we can learn a great lesson here. John the Baptist takes these doubts to Jesus. That is also where we need to go too with all our fears, and questions, and doubts, and disappointments. Take them all to Jesus. Hear what Jesus has to say. Listen to His Word. What does Jesus say to these disciples of John? ***Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor."***

Notice what Jesus does here. He doesn't just say "Yes, of course I am the promised Messiah." Jesus doesn't send rebuke or ask John and his disciples what's wrong with them. Jesus simply asks them to report what they see and hear. In fact, He points them to what the Scriptures said the Christ would do, and then to look for themselves what Jesus is doing. Jesus was fulfilling the words of Isaiah. He was giving sight to the blind, making the lame walk, opening the ears of the deaf, and providing cures for lepers. He even raised the dead. Everywhere Jesus went He was preaching good news to the poor. But these words, similar to setting free the captives, had far more than just physical blessings in mind. Isaiah was prophesying about the spiritual blessings Christ would bring. The lame, the leper, the blind, and obviously the dead were forbidden under the law to enter into the temple. They were unclean. In other words, Jesus came to restore them not just to enter the temple but to restore their relationship with God. The Messiah came to save sinners and bring them back to God. That was what Jesus was here to do!

Jesus reassures John the Baptist and his disciples that they had not misplaced their trust. ***“Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me.”*** Jesus is the promised Savior. He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He is the Savior who will return one day to judge the world. The message God gave to John will hold true. John will not be disappointed for placing his trust in Jesus. Yes, things would not turn out so great for John there in Herod’s prison as Herod would eventually have his head, but John would be welcomed into Christ’s heavenly kingdom. He would receive God’s eternal grace and blessings. John should in no way lower his expectations for Jesus will do even greater things for John, better than he could ever imagine.

Isn’t this also true for us? When we take our disappointments and doubts to Jesus what does Jesus do with them? Wouldn’t Jesus turn to us and ask what we see and hear? What do you see and hear God doing for you this Christmas? Do you see and hear the angels say: ***“I bring you good news of great joy...a Savior has been born to you?”*** Do you see and hear Christ living a perfect life of love that you and I have failed to live? Do you see and hear how the Christ suffered and how He died - how Jesus would not stop until He was finished and our sins paid for - even our sins of doubt? Do we and see and hear an empty tomb, the devil’s defeat, and a triumph over death and the grave? We have an advantage over John the Baptist because we not only get to see and hear Jesus teach and preach and heal, we get to see not just a God who is wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid into a manger, but we get to see Him on a cross winning our salvation. We get to see Him raised from the dead to secure our victory.

So what about our Christmas expectations? There is never a need to lower them, dear friends, not when we set our hearts on things above. For the greatest gift of all is already ours - a Savior has been born to us - He is Christ the Lord! We can take all our doubts, and fears, and questions to Jesus and He points us to His love and promises. What a friend we have in Jesus! We have a God who came to earth for us, so that one day we can go to heaven with Him. Why would we want or expect anything or anyone else! Amen.