

## Gaudete, the Third Sunday in Advent, A✠D 2010

### Matthew 11:2-10

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

1 From prison, John sent his disciples to Jesus to have them ask the Man Himself: “Are you the One who is to come, or shall we expect another?” John is in prison for his preaching, for his faithfulness to the Word of God, for calling Herod—even Herod—to repent of his false marriage to his brother’s wife. Herod threw John in prison for this preaching, but he never really disliked John. It was Herodius, Herod’s brother’s ex and Herod’s new, illicit wife, who wanted John more than merely imprisoned. So she sent her daughter to dance for a drunken Herod who was so delighted by the dance of his step-daughter that he promised to give her whatever she asked. When she would ask for the head of John the Baptist on a platter, Herod felt compelled to give her what she asked for. All of that is about to happen. John, about to be executed, about to give his head for being a faithful preacher, about to go before the Lord to prepare His way, even into death, he sent his disciples to Jesus. Even in the face of death, John has hope in the Christ.

2 That’s John’s office, his vocation, his calling: to send to Jesus. He is the last of the prophets of the old covenant, the final prophet to prepare for the long-awaited Messiah, the Anointed One, the Christ, the One to save His people from their captivity to sin and death. John has spent his career in the wilderness preaching, calling everyone to repentance, in order to prepare for the word of forgiveness that the Christ would come to proclaim through His death on the cross. John is the Forerunner. His office is not to draw people to himself, but to point them to Christ. And so, with one of the last things he does before being given the blessed death of martyrdom, John sends his disciples to Christ, as if to say, “You have been taught by me, not to follow me, but to follow Christ. Go hear from Him that He is the One I prepared you for.” In the face of his death, John wants his disciples to have the same hope he does.

3 The answer Jesus gives these sent to inquire of Him is probably the one John knew they would hear. “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.” Jesus is the fulfillment of every Old Testament prophecy, the “yes” to every promise God has made. His miracles confirm His divinity, His power over life and death.

4 “Jesus, Son of God, and Son of Mary, born in Bethlehem, is indeed the real Christ, and there is no other King and Redeemer of souls. We don’t want any other, we don’t need any other, for He is the perfect Savior who helps us out of every trouble. In Him the prophets’ predictions of the Messiah are precisely fulfilled. The eyes of the blind are opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped, the lame leaps like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb sings with joy [Isa 35:6]. The year of jubilee has come [Lev 25]. The bonds of death are loosed [Isa 61:1]. John whom the prophecy calls Elijah comes beforehand and prepares the way [Mal 4:5]. The greatest of all prophets is the herald for Him who became lowliest of all.” (Laache)

5 The temptation in Advent is two-pronged. The first temptation is to be offended by Jesus. John’s preaching to prepare the way before the coming of the Christ was offensive. And Jesus’ first public preaching was simply “Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand.” Today men are still offended when told to repent, when told not to steal or gain through dishonest means, when warned about not taking care of a neighbor’s physical needs, when told they ought not divorce or entice the neighbor’s wife. God’s Law is offensive. It calls you a sinner. It tells you you cannot love both your sins and the Savior.

6 But all of that offensiveness pales in comparison to the offense of the cross. That the Nativity of God happened specifically so that God could bear the sins of the world and suffer the punishment of death because of them, that's offensive. That God would save you apart from any merit or worthiness in you, simply because of the shed blood of Jesus on the cross, is offensive. That He would deliver the forgiveness of sins to you completely by himself, without any input or assistance from you, is offensive. That God would die for sinners, is offensive. This is the good news preached to the poor, to you. He is the Christ; do not look for another. Blessed is he who is not offended but who instead receives the Lord's gift of faith.

7 The other temptation of Advent is to despair of God's provision. Watching as their teacher was in prison must have been nearly unbearable for the disciples of John the Baptist. Even Jesus answer to their inquiry might have seemed insufficient. Sure, the blind see, lame walk, deaf hear, dead are raised, and the poor have the good news preached to them; but what good does that do when John is about to lose his head? Jesus came to die on the cross to forgive your sins, rose from the dead to give you the same resurrection and eternal life. But what does that mean for today? Where is the Returning Jesus, the Coming One when your husband is unfaithful, your children rebellious, your condition worsening, your life falling apart? What good does a Jesus who will return do you for right now? Does God really care?

8 John knew. So he sent his disciples to Jesus. Yes, He cares. Enough to give His life on the cross for you, even you, beloved. And He will come. Soon. Those two facts give you hope for today, hope in the face of a world breaking down, hope in the midst of a life out of your control, hope in the midst of death. So John sent his disciples to Jesus.

9 John's office was to bring his hearers to Jesus. The apostolic office is different. "This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy." Pastors are stewards, caretakers, of the mysteries of Christ, the Word and Sacraments. Their task is not to bring you to Christ, but to bring Christ to you in His Word and Sacraments, to give you hope in the midst of death. My office is to prepare you for the day of your death or for the Day of Christ's return, whichever comes first.

10 At your baptism, your pastor blessed you, saying, "The almighty God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has given you the new birth of water and of the Spirit and has forgiven you all your sins, strengthen you with His grace to life everlasting." When he confirmed you, he catechized you until you were able to answer "yes" to the question: "Do you intend to live according to the Word of God, and in faith, word, and deed to remain true to God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, even to death?" After each communion, you hear this blessing: "The Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ strengthen and preserve you body and soul to life everlasting." When death draws near, I will pray the commendation of the dying with you, wherein you will hear, "Go in peace. May God the Father, who created you, may God the Son, who redeemed you and saved you with His blood, may God the Holy Spirit, who sanctified you in the water of Holy Baptism, receive you into the company of saints and angels to await the resurrection and live in the light of His glory forevermore." Finally, at your funeral, those who mourn your death will pray, "we give thanks for Your loving kindness shown to Jeff and to all your servants who, having finished their course in faith, now rest from their labors. Grant that we also may be faithful unto death and receive the crown of eternal life."

11 The faithful, the Lord's elect, do not fear death. They know that they have hope even in death. Your Lord who died for you rose victorious from the grave. He has joined you into this very death and resurrection in Holy Baptism; He has fed you with His immortal Body and Blood. He has sent preachers to deliver His very forgiveness to you and to proclaim His faith-creating Word to you. Even in the face of death, you have sure and certain hope. Your Lord is the One who is to come, who is coming for you.

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

*Soli Deo Gloria*

Pastor Jeff Hemmer