

Gaudete

11 December, Anno Domini 2022

St. Matthew 11:2-11

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Redeemed of the Lord,

Doubt concerning Christ plagued even John the Baptist. No one is immune to it. And when we take stock of the world around us, we find plenty of reasons for doubt. We confess that Jesus conquered sin and death and yet greed and lust and jealousy and anger and unbelief and idolatry are everywhere while men are being pitted against one another, grocery and utility bills are climbing, God's created order is being turned on its head, and cemeteries are filling up. We confess that Jesus rose from the dead and ascended into heaven where He sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty to rule over all things in heaven and on earth. Yet Jesus seems to be the last one ruling over anything. The rulers of the nations thirst for war. Christ's Church is under greater and greater pressure to conform to the materialist and self-centered ideologies of the day. Churches languish and struggle to pay the bills because the pleasures of the world are too tempting and too immediately gratifying. The blessed Word and precious sacraments are cast aside by so many of Christ's own children.

Is it any wonder that doubt begins to creep in? Is it any wonder when we are forced to taste bitter affliction - broken bodies, broken minds, crashing economies, strained marriages, betrayal - that the joy of Christ begins to fade and we begin to wonder if we're following the wrong Christ? John had remained faithful and look where it landed him - death row. Maybe if he had just minded his business and let Herod commit adultery with his brother's wife, maybe if he hadn't insisted on things being so black and white, maybe he would be free. Did he preach too sharply? Did he not compromise enough? Had he misconstrued God's Word?

No. John was a faithful preacher. Indeed, he is the greatest of those born among women. He rightly brought the full judgment of the Law to bear against our sin. No one came out unscathed when the Baptist opened his prophetic mouth. And if you cared to listen, John's favorite thing to proclaim was the One who was greater than himself, the one who was least in the kingdom of God, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

But John still bore the flesh of Adam and therefore was subject to the same bouts of uncertainty and doubt that plague you. He still suffered from the enduring blindness which obscures man's view of God. His feet were hindered from walking in the way of the commandments with all his heart, soul, strength, and mind. The leprosy of doubt still clung to his sinful flesh and he still suffered the deafness that hinders the Word of God from penetrating deep into his heart. John was no less vulnerable to doubt and uncertainty than you are.

Let that be a comfort to you. Your doubts and weakness of flesh aren't unique to you nor do they immediately mean that you are no longer a Christian. What they do immediately mean is that, like John, you too need preachers sent to you to hold before you the deeds of the Christ. Christ came precisely for those who suffer this world's brokenness and whose spirit's have been crushed by the weight of God's wrath, the vile thoughts and desires that they see within themselves, and their inability to save themselves from damnation. Christ in His mercy sent messengers back to John to say "Your faith is not in vain. I am the Christ of God who has come to bind up the weakhearted and the distressed, to strengthen the weak, to loose the bonds of Satan's prisoners.

"But I do not do this immediately. I do not promise you a change in your earthly condition. You must still bear the crosses which I lay upon you in order to put your sinful flesh to death so that you cling to Me. You will not now see the fullness of my work for you. Now, you must only believe me. Now you must trust when I tell you that your faith is not in vain. Now you must hear of my work, my death and my resurrection, and believe that these were done for you. You must receive in faith the washing by which I promise to cleanse you of your sins and bestow upon you eternal life and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Now you must receive in faith the food I give, My Body and My Blood, for the forgiveness of your sins and the strengthening of your faith. Let these put your doubts to rest. I give them to you that you may be certain of my promises. I give them so that you have something hang on to when doubts assail you and my work is not evident to you."

These gifts Christ bestows upon you are your cause for rejoicing in this mad and chaotic world. They are the iron-clad guarantee that though you must now suffer the hatred of the world and the fallout of sin in this life, you will be set free. Your captivity will come to a glorious end when the Christ returns. On that day there will no longer be need for messengers and reassurance. On that day you and the Baptizer and all people will see and know that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ whom God sent to set us free from death. Do not let the humbleness of Christ and His works cause you to stumble. Do not look for another. There isn't one to be

found. He who heals all our diseases and forgives all our sins was born in Bethlehem, died on Golgotha, and now sits at the right hand of God. He now stands in our midst to open the prison of our fear and doubt and set us free to rejoice in our salvation.

Rejoice, O people of God! The Christ has come and redeemed you from sin and death.

In the Name of +Jesus.

(We stand.) Now may the peace of God which passes all human understanding keep your hearts and your minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Pastor Ulmer