**Luke 7:18-28 December 12, 2021**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text for this morning comes from our Gospel lesson, Luke 7 here re-reading these words. “And Jesus 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.” This is our text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

This 3rd Sunday in Advent is a special Sunday of rejoicing. This is traditionally the Sunday that we light our 3rd, and festive (Rose) or pink candle on our Advent wreath. It is a small break before the great celebration of Christmas where in this penitential season we pray in the Collect of the Day, “Lord Jesus Christ, we implore You to hear our prayers and to lighten the darkness of our hearts by your gracious visitation.” Where in our lessons we hear that word “rejoice!” In Zephaniah “Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion, shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem.” And the well-known verse from Philippians that was echoed in our Introit. “Rejoice in the Lord always, again I will say, Rejoice.” This is a Sunday of celebration, rejoicing, giving praise to God for all of his wonderful gifts and mighty works. At my home congregation at Trinity Monitor in Bay City this was a special Sunday of special music, a Sunday set aside for bells and choirs and joy. It’s a happy Sunday of rejoicing that is for everyone except John the Baptist. Instead of finding John, as we did last week, out in the wilderness calling sinners to repentance and pointing to the greater one to come, we find him in jail. Wasting away. There is no rejoicing on his lips, this isn’t the moment where we hear him pointing to Christ as the greater one whose sandals he was unworthy to untie or even when he declares that Jesus is in fact the perfect Savior, the sacrifice for sin by calling out “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” Instead we can be sure that he hasn’t been treated well in this prison and that as we know from our study of the Scriptures he never gets out of this prison. He eventually is beheaded here. He doesn’t reach out to Christ with words of rejoicing, instead doubt has clouded his mind and he sends his disciples to Jesus asking, “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?”

John the Baptist, the final prophet of the old covenant, the one whose birth is announced by an angel and who comes in miraculous and dramatic fashion, born of a woman who was barren all her life. A foundation of the faith, the one who was even kicking and recognizing Jesus Christ while he was **in the womb**, has doubted if Jesus was truly the promised Messiah. John was even present at Jesus’ Baptism, he was after all the one who had performed it, and so he would have been a firsthand eye witness to the miraculous sight of the Holy Spirit descending upon Jesus like a dove, and the voice of God the Father speaking from heaven. He would have been there to see it all, yet here he is, his situation changed, doubting the validity of Christ’s claim, that He was in fact the Savior of the world.

The rejoicing in his life, had ended. And it’s easy for us to fall into the same temptation, to let doubts creep into our minds even when we have witnessed in our own lives amazing and miraculous gifts, mercy, and love from God. But that’s the problem with the way we view things. We don’t just live in a “gotta have it now” culture and an on demand world, but we ourselves are “gotta have it now” people. We remember the problems of the present rather than the gifts of the past. We focus and dwell on what God has specifically done for us lately. We let questions of doubt and frustration cloud our judgment and enter our minds, changing our view toward God. “Where is he now? When I have no time to get all of the things I need to get done? When Christmas is just around the corner and I haven’t even started buying presents yet? Where is God when I really need him? When my health gets worse….when a loved one dies, when my car breaks down, when my bank account is dwindling or empty? When my child won’t listen, or I feel depressed, sad, and angry? Where is God then? Are you really the loving, all powerful God that you say that you are? Or is there another? Or is there perhaps…no God at all?

Even the rejoicing that we experience in our lives when we dwell upon the gifts of God is short lived, and quickly turns to doubts, depression, and anger. We don’t want to hear words, or study God’s Word, we want to see action! But that’s exactly what Jesus does when he hears from John through his disciples. Jesus Christ could have easily just busted John out of prison, or given John a miraculous sign by sending a multitude of angels to prove to him that he had power from on high. In the same way he could magically fix all of your doubts, fears, and problems with his omnipotent power, but that may not be exactly what we need in our lives, only what we want. Rather than God doing everything the way that we see it or by our will, Christ shows the authority that he has as the Messiah, by in that very hour after hearing their questions, healing many people of diseases, and plagues, and evil spirits. And even taking those who were blind, many as Luke records, and bestowing upon them, sight. The blind finally seeing isn’t a coincidence that it comes last, but was of course a wakeup call for anyone reading through this text. It is a sign of what would happen for John by hearing about what Christ was doing. It was a sign of how John’s disciples and later Jesus other disciples interpreted the miracles of healing and power that Jesus did in their sight. This was the proof. Not just empty words or promises, like so many false teachers who came before or still exist today. But action. Action not on behalf of himself, but instead to set right the corruption of sin upon the world, by healing the evidence of sin in that community, and taking away the sickness of those who were around him.

The evidence was right before their eyes. Jesus tells them to return to John and tell him what they have themselves seen and heard. They became eyewitnesses of the truth of Christ’s authority and power. They saw the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers who were cleansed, the deaf who now could hear, and the dead who were raised up, and even they themselves who had received the same good news that was preached to others. The final two are lasting evidence of Christ and his work. Instead of only coming and taking care of specific problems for specific people, Jesus is more than just a physician of the body, but he comes as the Great physician of the soul.

Think about it, which would you rather have, a bottle of pills that will treat the symptom of coughing or a sore throat as long as you take the pills? Or would you rather that your doctor cure the illness that was causing you to cough and have a sore throat in the first place? Which is a bigger sign of care? Handing a hungry person a sandwich? Or showing them a means by which they can provide for themselves and their family either by gathering or producing their own food, or giving them a job in which they can earn money to buy it? That’s really what’s at the heart of what Christ does here in our Gospel lesson. While these miraculous actions and healing are signs that He is in fact the Messiah and has power over sin and over sickness, it is his raising the dead, and his preaching the good news to the poor that are lasting and eternal gifts.

For everyone that Jesus healed, eventually would die. It was treating a specific symptom. For the blind to see the rest of their lives was an amazing gift for their earthly life, but it would not stop them from dying eventually one day. The same goes for the lame who could now walk, the lepers who had a place in society again, and the deaf who could hear. Those were all symptoms that were treated, but the greater threat remained. They all eventually died. Just like we all will. Sin is the promise of that. And the illness of sin can’t be treated by a medicine or a surgery. Sin’s corruption is so complete in our bodies that our flesh and our heart are all inclined to sin. So while we come to God and ask for specific help with different problems that arise in our lives, the truth is even if God did magically fix all of those issues, there would only be more on the horizon. And ultimately all of those issues are meaningless in the grand scheme of life. Because we are facing death. We will die. And left in sin, there is no life or fellowship with God.

The good news that is preached to us poor, miserable, sinners is the life that Christ came to earn on our behalf. While John the Baptist could have been restored, the fact was that the work that God had set out for him to do, was accomplished. As his ministry decreased, Christ’s increased. John’s disciples became Jesus’ disciples. But the message was the same. Repent, for that is the only way that the disease of sin can be cured. Repent and come to God in submission to His Will, for only through the work of Christ can sinful man be saved. God shows us his amazing love in Christ’s ministry in that Jesus doesn’t just take care of the needs of a few who came to see him and were afflicted by earthly diseases and had earthly problems, but instead Jesus remains vigilant and continues toward the cross. The final antidote to the terminal disease of sin. His death, his blood, shed on the cross, an ultimate sacrifice for sin. The redemption and buying back of our bodies and our souls from eternal death. So that while John the Baptist eventually passed away on this earth, as did his disciples and all those who were healed by Jesus that day, their salvation was earned by that same Savior. And their bodies too will rise, when he returns, just as ours will. Christ cares more about our eternal life, than our earthly happiness. And that is something that we should rejoice over, praise God for, and remember each and every Sunday that we are blessed to worship him.

The truth of the good news, that is again preached to us this morning, through the words of Jesus Christ, and the eye witness account of Luke, can’t help but bring forth rejoicing on this third Sunday in Advent. For in the remembrance of the cross, we see why we even bother to put up the tree, hang up the lights, and rejoice over the birth of God’s own Son. Because Jesus was more than just a man focused on earthly problems, but he came with a heavenly and divine plan. To save you from your sin. To die for everyone of all time. Let us rejoice together and await his coming first in the stable, and soon from the clouds.

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.