**Written Copy: When the Kingdoms Not What We Expect Luke 7:22-23**

3rd Sunday in Advent

Sunday December 16th, 2018

**Text: Luke 7:22-23**

22 And he answered them, "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers <Note:`Leprosy` was a term for several skin diseases; see Leviticus 13> are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them. 23 And blessed is the one who is not offended by me."

22 And in giving answer He said to them: “When you return bring a report to John concerning those things you have seen and have heard: the blind are recovering sight, the lame are now walking, those with leprosy are being made clean, the deaf are now hearing, those dead in the grave are being raised up, those (spiritually) poor and destitute are receiving the Good News. 23 And blessed is the one who has not been caused to fall away (fall into a deadly trap) because of me.”

**Exegetical Statement:**

John the Baptist, while languishing in prison, sends two of his disciples to Jesus to ask a question that is heavy on his heart: “Are the One who is coming are we to be expecting another?” Jesus has not been fulfilling the prophecies of judgment that were a part of John’s preaching about “the One who comes after me.” Jesus points John’s disciples to all the works of grace which were prophesied about Him in Scripture. And then sends this message to him: “Blessed is the one who does not lose faith because of me.” After John’s disciples go Jesus gives words of praise to the people about John reminding them that he was not a vacillating voice the bowed to the pressure of the religious or secular powers, not was he part of the crowd that sought fame and fortune at the people’s expense. He spoke the truth from the LORD calling all people to repent. Jesus calls him the most important of all the prophetic voices of old covenant. But as important as he is, being one who was prophesied about himself, the least member of the kingdom Christ came to bring is more important than John’s position of “way-preparer”, since the One whose way he came to prepare stands before them, and His kingdom has come to them.

**Focus Statement:**

Jesus fulfilled the OT prophesy regarding the gracious intervention that would mark the Messiah’s beginning work. His kingdom is present among us in strength and power, but not yet in judgment against men. Christ judged and defeated sin, death, and the devil so that we might draw us into His eternal kingdom. He is at work inside us and outside us in the world in ways that are often hidden to us but have the end goal of drawing all His chosen into His kingdom that will consume reality on the Last Day.

**Function Statement:**

**Why it’s important to know**:

John the Baptist sees the lack of vengeance and judgment for sin and begins to doubt if Jesus is really the Messiah he thought Him to be. We can view the world situation as well as our own sadness and loneliness at Christmas time and wonder if the kingdom Baby Jesus came to establish is really at work or is it too weak and ineffective to overcome the darkness present around us and in our lives.

**What the hearer should do as a result**:

Hold fast by faith and not by sight in the presence of His Kingdom in us and among us now. Believe that Christ rules as King and is at work in ways the devil cannot overcome, nor can we easily discern or understand. Even as we suffer through hard times that to us don’t look like the aftermath of victory we are to rejoice and proclaim in His coming in grace on Christmas and His coming in victory and vengeance on the Last Day

**Subject Sentence: When the Kingdom comes not as we expect**

Those of you who have spent some time with me know that I’m a fan of The Beatles. And one of the first Beatles records I ever owned was given to me as a Christmas gift. It was “Sgt Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band” I recall reading an interview with Paul McCartney who was telling about what the music critics were writing as the band was busy recording what would be turning point in rock and roll music. The Beatles were exploring all the studio had to offer and ways they could layer sound that had never been done before up to that point. The lyrics were deeper and more surreal than anything they had written before. And they attempted to use the music to match and enhance the lyric and the song meaning in ways that had not been attempted before. But it was taking far longer than they ever had to put the album out. And the music critics of the day attributed the lull in the release of new material to the band’s creativity drying up; that they were just sitting in the studio not knowing what to do. McCartney said they would read these news articles and laugh, then rub their hands together saying to the misinformed critics; “Just you wait”. It was a cast of things looking far different than what was really going on.

This is something many of us can relate to in our lives right now. It’s Christmas time. As the song goes “It’s the most wonderful time of the year.” Except for many of us that’s far from true. It’s the time of year when the absence of a loved one is emphasized. We remember those Christmases past when the whole family was together as we now gather without them. It’s true for many of you here today as well as those members who are homebound and in Care Facilities. Perhaps even more so for them since they are unable to gather here with us for Sunday and Advent Services. They are missing loved ones in their lives too. Not just the family members that don’t come to visit but those who have passed on too. This reality makes it hard to see this time of year as one that creates the desire to “Deck the Halls” or sing “Joy to the World” or dream of a “White Christmas”. It may be Christmas on the calendar, but it just doesn’t look right or feel right. As far as Christmas goes things certainly look far different than what is supposed to be going on.

John the Baptist could understand where we are coming from. In our Gospel Reading we find John the Baptist languishing in prison. He has been arrested and is being held by Herod the tetrarch. His crime? Doing what God had called him to do: call people to repentance. John had denounced Herod for divorcing his first wife to marry the wife of his brother Philip. John boldly proclaimed God’s message to all walks of life, including the common folk as well as soldiers, and the religious leaders of the day. He had been commissioned by the Lord to do so as the one who was to prepare the way for the coming of the Lord. As recorded in **Luke 3:7-9** **7 He said therefore to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8 Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. 9 Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire**." And in **Luke 3:17** “**His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.**" His message was from the LORD Himself and echoed prophets of long ago such as was written in **Isaiah 35:4** “**Say to those who have an anxious heart, "Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you.**" John the Baptist knew the Messiah was the One he was preparing the way for. He knew that the Messiah would have a two-fold emphasis in His ministry: to save the righteous-those who repented of their sins and bring vengeance on those who refused to repent but remained in their sins. He also knew at this point who that Messiah, that One who was to come after him was. At least he thought he knew. But now as he sat in prison, he was no longer so sure.

Things no longer looked right to him. He had pointed out Jesus as the Messiah: The Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. But what he was not seeing was the vengeance and recompense: the reward that God would give to both those who repented, and the punishment earned by those who didn’t. He was locked up in that prison because Herod had not received yet what was coming to him.

So John sent two of his disciples to Jesus with a simple question. It was a question that did not come from a heart of disbelief. If John had lost faith, then why bother asking Jesus at all. He had faith but was looking for reassurance. The question was just to make sure. Jesus; are you that One who is to come? Or should we in fact be looking for someone else. Just need to know Jesus because right now things don’t look right.

Jesus responds not in anger, not with impatience, not judgmentally, but in love. He asked John to consider all the reports he had previously seen and heard about what He had been doing. (**Luke 7:22-23**) 22"**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. 23 And blessed is the one who is not offended by me**." Jesus is saying to John: recall all that Scripture has prophesied about the merciful acts that the Messiah will do when He comes. That the people should not fear because He comes to save them. Remember John what the prophet Isaiah wrote which I myself read in the Synagogue in Nazareth: (**Isaiah 61:1-2a)** “**1The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; 2 to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor,**” This prophetic word that Isaiah wrote about the Messiah, the one I told them was fulfilled in their hearing. And I say the same to you. You are blessed John if you don’t judge My ministry as the Messiah, the Christ simply by what you see now and by what you believe it should be.

John was right in his preaching. The Messiah had come as Isaiah 61:2 says “**to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God;”** John just couldn’t understand from his point of view how the vengeance portion was to fit in. Jesus had come to proclaim and extend favor and grace to all mankind. The day of vengeance that He had come to provide was not against unrepentant sinners, or Herod, or the Romans, or the Pharisees and Scribes. Jesus came to wreak holy vengeance and defeat much deadlier foes: sin, death, and the devil. Even if He was to defeat those human adversaries that were on the minds of most of His followers those three deadlier foes would still condemn all men to eternal death. His acts of merciful healing of the body were just a foreshadowing of the spiritual restoration and healing that would come through His suffering and death on the cross. There He would remove the power of sin from your life and mind. Though you continue to sin each and every one is washed away from your permanent record by the blood of Christ. His suffering and death squares your account with the Father completely. Therefore every time the devil tries to accuse you and lay claim to you his accusations fall short and his claim is thrown out of court. You are no longer the devil’s property but have been sealed as a child of God in your baptism. And through His resurrection He has defeated the power of death over you. You and I will face temporal death. But it is no longer something to be feared. We know by faith what waits on the other side. We know who waits on the other side. Death for you and I through our faith in Christ is the door that opens to Eternal Life. Because of all Christ has done for you and I this verse from our Old Testament Lesson speaks directly to us: (**Zephaniah 3:17-18**) “ **17 The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing. 18 I will gather those of you who mourn for the festival, so that you will no longer suffer reproach**.”

The same assurance that Jesus offered to John He extends to you and I today. When things don’t look right in our life, when Christmas doesn’t look like Christmas. When we might have cause to doubt whether His kingdom really has come, if it is really working in our life, if it really is at work in the world around us, He says to you and I just as He said to John (Luke 7:23) “**23 Blessed is the one who is not offended by me**." Blessed is the one who stands on faith and not on sight. Blessed is the one who realizes that my kingdom is here in power, its just hidden. And that I am here in power working, not to condemn, but to save. To call out to the lost through the message of the Gospel; to call people into my Kingdom while its still the year of the Lord’s favor, before the day of justice and judgment finally comes.

What can you do when things in your life don’t look right? When its not “The Most Wonderful Time of the Year”? When its not a “Holly Jolly Christmas”? Reach out in faith as John the Baptist did. Reach out to the words of Scripture. Reach out through the Advent and Christmas services offered. Reach out your brothers and sisters in Christ. Reach out to your Pastor. Reach out and receive the love and comfort and joy that the Lord has to offer which is not from inside you but comes from outside, from Him.

Yesterday nine of us had the opportunity to reach out with that love, comfort, and joy to members of our congregation who really needed to hear it. Those who can’t join us here because they are either homebound or live in Care Facilities. It is amazing what the Lord can do just through the simple act of a visit and the singing of Christmas Carols. We saw big smiles appear on faces. We saw and experienced the glad greetings that come with those we haven’t seen for a while. And we shared tears of joy. But maybe the most special moments were at two of the Care Facilities when we visited Joan Reich at Mission Point Nursing & Physical Rehabilitation Center of Holly, and when we visited Nancy Miller and Naomi Jones at Springvale Assisted Living in Swartz Creek. At both of those places we got to sing of God’s Christmas gift of love in Christ in the dining room with our members present along with others whose home is at those facilities and with the staff. We weren’t the Mormon Tabernacle Choir, but the Lord used us, nonetheless. We brought the love and faith of Christ’s kingdom to all who heard us. Tears of joy and messages of thanksgiving were shared by residents and staff alike. We let them know that Christ’s kingdom is still active in and around them. That He loves them and is rejoicing over them with gladness and wants to quiet them with His love. Through God’s word in song we brought them that peace which Paul talks about in our Epistle Lesson (Philippians 4:7): **the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus**.” It wasn’t just a peace that we shared with them. Jesus, through His kingdom that surrounds us and is within us shared it with us too. May that peace be yours and be growing in your hearts through your faith in Christ Jesus. Amen.