

**Advent III 2017**

***“Are he thou he that should come, or do we look for another?”***

**In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.  
Amen.**

**As you read our Gospel passage today, it might seem that poor John the Baptist got a raw deal. After all, he was born for one reason, and one reason only: to prepare the way for Jesus. His only goal in life from his earliest remembrance was to get people ready for the One to be born at Bethlehem. As far as he knew, he had done exactly what he was called to do. In fact, he has lived his public life in such a way that he has pointed thousands to the Messiah. He never sought glory, in fact, he lived in great poverty, dressing in rags and eating a diet of grasshoppers and honey. By most, he was considered a freak, but regardless, he followed his call and followed it faithfully.**

**How faithfully? Well, he had the privilege of baptizing the ONE he had been announcing; the ONE who had fulfilled the Old Testament Prophecies: his cousin, Jesus.**

**So, if he did every thing right, why is he now sitting in a dungeon?**

**You and I are certainly blessed to be Christian. We are God's "other" chosen people; the members of the New and Eternal Jerusalem. But we also recognize that we live in a broken world. Things go wrong, plans fail. The outcome of our goals sometimes isn't what we had hoped. Tragedy strikes. Death takes its toll. Pain is a part of everyday life. We find that even Christianity isn't all that some claim it to be. Although we know we can have joy in trials and God works all together for good, sometimes we don't see it. Some days faith wanes and we wonder where God is.**

**Other than his cousin Jesus, scripture tells us that John the Baptist was the greatest man born of woman. He was faithful to his mission, preached the Word with boldness and zeal, and ignored the opinions of those who thought him psychotic.**

**Here was a man who dared challenge the morals of King Herod. Can you imagine telling the most powerful man on earth at the time that he was living in sin by sleeping with his brother's wife? As the old commentator used to say, you know the "rest of the story." John ends up in prison, but the worst is yet to come. His head will eventually end up on a silver platter, but this is not what he expects. As he languishes in prison, he has much time to think.**

**Scripture tells us that he had been filled with the Holy Spirit from the moment of his conception, and that Spirit led him to do all of the right things. So if that's the case, where's cousin Jesus? Where are the armies? Where is the restoration of Jerusalem? After all, wasn't that the Old Testament prediction?**

**Well, yes and no. Jesus was not what the people expected. The OT Prophets did their jobs, but the people made up the story to suit their own desires.**

**Thus, we will not read that John is rescued from prison; no angel to release him like Peter in Acts. No earthquake that frees Paul and Silas. For John, this is the end of the road. He is living his final days in what seems like failure, embarrassment, and shame.**

**John's life is an example for many of us who follow in his footsteps. He is having doubts. Thus, he sends his disciples to ask Jesus, Are You The True Messiah, or Should We Be Looking Elsewhere?**

**Two thousand years later, many still ask that same question when times are tough. In his heart, John knew well that Jesus was the Messiah. Upon seeing our Lord, he had boldly proclaimed, "Behold the Lamb of God. Behold Him That Taketh away the Sin of the World."**

**If that wasn't enough, John witnessed the physical proof following the Baptism of Jesus. The heavens opened up, the Holy Spirit Descended, and the voice of God proclaimed, "This is my beloved Son."**

**Yet, he still has doubt. Doubt because God's plan worked differently than his.**

**There is a reason the Church places this particular Gospel passage in the liturgy this Third Week in Advent. It is the same reason the rose colored candle burns and the festive vestments are donned this morning.**

**This (point to vestment) is a symbol of hope. It is to remind us that no matter how dark things might seem at times, no matter how great our doubts might be, HOPE always abounds!**

**But let me also say this, HOPE requires work. This time of year, especially the month of December is a time of deep despair for many. Any priest, or any clergyman for that matter, will tell you that this is the heaviest month for counseling and confession. As a priest, it is often difficult not to become somewhat melancholy when you hear the sadness in others. But prayer along with God's**

**Word . and examples of men such as John the Baptist, can sustain our faith.**

**You see, John had done everything right. In fact, even when he expressed doubts about the identity of Jesus, Jesus still praises him for remaining faithful. Like most Jews at the time, John expected Jesus to be a warrior that would restore Jerusalem; John expected to have a front row seat when all of this restoration would begin. Unfortunately, John had an incomplete revelation of who Jesus was. YES. He knew that Jesus was the Messiah, but he failed to realize that Jesus must first suffer, die, rise, and return to God's Right Hand before coming back, what we refer to as the Second Advent.**

**Well, as Matthew tells us, Jesus doesn't give John a direct answer to his question. In fact, he rarely gives direct answers to questions. He either tells parables or reminds folks that the answer has already been given. In today's lesson, he sends John's disciples back with an answer from Isaiah 35; a Scripture John would have been very familiar with. He says take a look around at what's happening: the blind now see, the lame now walk, the deaf hear, lepers are cleansed, the dead are raised, and the Gospel is being preached. In**

**other words, the Scriptures are being fulfilled. But notice: That fulfillment is in God's time.**

**That's where we most often fail. We will never have hope, we will never grow in faith, we will never stop doubting until we realize that our timetable is not the same as God's. Once we realize, AND, more importantly, accept this, HOPE abounds.**

**Christians spend more time trying to find the answers or reasons that will never be revealed in this life. We want some cause, some root of sin, someone to blame.**

**But simple, child-like faith believes that God is good; that he loves us unconditionally, and would never hurt us. Simple faith remembers that we, like John, don't have the big picture.**

**We have to stay focused on Christ. Once in prison, John could no longer see Jesus, all he could see were the immediate conditions surrounding him. When we focus on the negative influences in our lives or obstacles we think impossible to overcome, our faith wanes. Do you remember Peter walking on the water? He was fine until he remembered that what he was doing was humanly impossible and he promptly sank. It was only when he looked back to Jesus that he was OK.**

**In a matter of days we will celebrate the Feast of Our Redemption, also known as Christmas. The hour and a half that we spend here on Christmas Eve can give us a hope and peace beyond man's understanding. Simply pray the Christmas Collect and focus on the words "adoption and grace." If that prayer is prayed from the heart, you will experience a hope that knows no bounds as you realize that you are a Child of God and one with the Newborn King.**

**In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.  
Amen.**