

The Third Sunday in Advent – Pr. Faugstad sermon
St. Matthew 11:2-10: “We Follow the One Who Comes to Save.”
December 13/14, 2025 | Saude, Jerico, & Redeemer Lutheran Churches

In Nomine Iesu

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Lord God, heavenly Father, You gave Your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, to become Man and to come into the world that He might destroy the works of the devil, deliver us poor offenders from sin and death, and give us everlasting life: We beseech You so to rule and govern our hearts by Your Holy Spirit that we may seek no other refuge than His Word, and thus avoid the sin to which we are by nature inclined, in order that we may always be found among the faithful followers of Your Son, Jesus Christ, and by faith in Him obtain eternal salvation; through the same, Your beloved Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one true God, now and forever. Amen. (*Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary*, p. 147)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)

The sermon text for today is written in the eleventh chapter of the Gospel according to St. Matthew. We read selected verses in Jesus' name:

Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples and said to Him, “Are You the One who is to come, or shall we look for another?” And Jesus answered them, “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.” / As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who wear soft clothing are in kings’ houses. What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is he of whom it is written, ‘Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, who will prepare Your way before You.’” (^{ESV})

These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Joh. 17:17)

In Christ Jesus, who was anointed to bring good news to the poor, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound (Isa. 61:1), and who did that for you and me, dear fellow redeemed:

What did the crowds go out into the wilderness to see? They heard about a man, a preacher, a strange man. He didn’t dress like everybody else; he wore camel’s hair clothing with a leather belt around his waist. He didn’t eat what everyone else did; he was content with locusts and wild honey. He didn’t talk like the other religious leaders of the day. He spoke with authority, and he called out their hypocrisy: “*You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit in keeping with repentance*” (Mat. 3:7-8).

His name was John, the son of the old priest Zechariah. Perhaps some recalled how Zechariah had lost the ability to speak while he was burning incense in the temple. He doubted the angel’s announcement that he would have a son. His speech did not return until John was born. “*These things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea*,” and at the time many wondered what this child would be (Luk. 1:65-66). They could see that he was different even at an early age. “*The hand of the Lord was with him*,” and he “*became strong in spirit*” (vv. 66, 80).

Then as an adult, John received his call. We are told that "*the word of God came to [him] in the wilderness. And he went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins*" (Luk. 3:2-3). All sorts of people from every station in society came to hear him teach and be baptized by him. They knew that something big was happening, but they didn't know exactly what it was.

As they imagined what this could mean, they noted how John resembled the prophet Elijah, who had also worn garments of hair with a leather belt around his waist (2Ki. 1:8). Elijah had stood alone against all the authorities just as John was doing. There was also a prophecy in the last chapter of the last book in their Scriptures, the book of Malachi, where the LORD said, "*Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes*" (4:5). Was this man standing before them Elijah himself sent back from heaven to earth? Or could he actually be the Messiah?

John made it clear who he was and wasn't. He said he was not the Christ or Elijah or the Prophet foretold by Moses (Joh. 1:19-21). Then who was he? He said, "*I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said*" (v. 23). He was "*the voice*," God's voice, a messenger preparing the people for something more. He was not there to tell them what they wanted to hear like a reed shaking in the wind, or to teach them how to chase the finer things in life like a self-absorbed member of the king's court.

He was preaching to them in the wilderness far away from common comforts and cultural snares because One much greater than him was coming. The people must get ready; they must be prepared. Unlike John with his water Baptism, this One would come baptizing "*with the Holy Spirit and fire*" (Luk. 3:16). He would read people's hearts. He would know who was with Him and who was not. John said He would "*gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire*" (v. 17).

This One was revealed to John when Jesus came to be baptized by him in the Jordan River. When He was baptized, the Holy Spirit descended like a dove and rested on Him, and the Father spoke from heaven, "*This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased*" (Mat. 3:17). John now pointed to Jesus and said, "*Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!*" (Joh. 1:29).

John had done his job; he had fulfilled his calling. He had done what God sent him to do. He could have looked for personal glory, for higher status in the religious community. He could have jealously guarded his disciples and shielded them from the influence of others. But John knew his place. He was just the messenger. As more and more people began to follow Jesus instead of John, John said, "*He must increase, but I must decrease*" (Joh. 3:30).

It wasn't long after this that John was locked up in prison. He had condemned the adulterous actions of the king, so the king had him arrested. In a short amount of time, John went from a popular preacher surrounded by crowds—including the rich, influential, and powerful, sitting at his feet, listening to his every word—to a man alone, in chains, with just a few disciples stopping by to visit. Was it worth it?

What would you think if you were in his shoes? If you were in prison away from your family, away from your friends, locked up because you told the truth, because you did the Lord's work, would you be content with that? None of us so far has had to face prison for believing in Jesus and speaking His Word. But we have faced smaller tests to our faith. Would we risk being pushed aside by the popular group because we wouldn't go along with their sin? Or risk our jobs because we wouldn't go along with unethical practices? Or risk conflict with family members because we wouldn't support their bad decisions?

Our faith has been tested in various ways, unique to each of us. Often we stand at a crossroads: Do I take this path which requires me to compromise my beliefs and morals, but which offers prominence or pleasure? Or do I take the harder path, the path God wants, but which requires struggle and suffering? We rarely regret taking the right path when we are looking backwards at it, but it is tougher when we are looking at the options in front of us. We prefer to have it easy. We prefer to fit in. We would rather go along with the world than against it.

But what does that gain us? Temporary happiness, short-lived success, fleeting joy. Jesus asks the important question: *"For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?"* (Mat. 16:26). John would not sell his soul for worldly success. *"He must increase,"* said John, *"but I must decrease"* (Joh. 3:30).

But was prison starting to get to John? Is that why he sent his disciples to ask Jesus, *"Are You the One who is to come, or shall we look for another?"* Was John discontent with the pace of Christ's work? Did he expect more action? More fire and brimstone? More mighty works? Or did he send his disciples, so they would follow Jesus instead of him? Based on what we know of John, that seems more likely. And Jesus replied to those disciples, *"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."*

John was not offended by Jesus. He trusted in Jesus, and that trust was not misplaced. John soon gave up his life for the Gospel, and his soul entered the heavenly bliss of God. Our Lord promises the same care for you, even if life does not go the way you would like, even if it seems that troubles meet you at every turn, even if your earthly end comes sooner than you expect. Your trust in Him is not misplaced either.

Jesus is the One who gives sight to the blind, healing to the lame and the lepers, hearing to the deaf, and life to the dead. He gives forgiveness to sinners, righteousness to the ungodly, and eternal life to we who were spiritually dead. He is no weak master, no reed shaken by the wind, no effeminate royal. He is not overcome by the world; He overcomes the world (Joh. 16:33). He is not captured by the devil's snares; He crushes Satan's head and dispels his accusations against us.

You don't follow Jesus because He promises glory in the world. You follow Him because He promises an end to all your trouble and suffering here and promises everlasting glory in heaven. He is the Coming One, the One sent by God the Father to redeem all sinners. He went to the cross with perfect devotion and purpose to cancel the debt of your sin. He suffered eternal damnation for your weaknesses, for your taking the wrong path, for your failures to follow Him. You can't go back and fix what you have done wrong, and you don't have to. Jesus forgives you all these sins and covers you with His grace.

So you go forward, your eyes on Him. You follow Him through times of trial and triumph, hardship and happiness. Like John, you set aside whatever plans you might have had for this life, and you point to Him. Your faithfulness to Him and your efforts for Him are not wasted. A life lived in His name, receiving the gifts of His grace, is a blessed life. He does not forsake His people. He does not leave you to suffer alone. He comes to you. He saves you. He leads you on till you reach your eternal rest, and so we pray in words of the hymn:

Jesus, still lead on / Till our rest be won;
And although the way be cheerless,
We will follow, calm and fearless;
Guide us by Your hand / To our promised land. (ELH #587, v. 1)

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.

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