

3rd Sunday in Advent – Year A – December 12, 2010

Based on Matthew 11:2-11 – written by Pastor Paul Horn – Faith Lutheran, Radcliff, KY

“What did you expect to see?”

The Minnesota Vikings and San Francisco 49ers were picked to be at the top of their divisions in football this year, as were the Dallas Cowboys, who are hosting the Super Bowl this year, and hoping to be one of the first teams to play the Super Bowl on their home turf. But all these teams are at the bottom of their division. But, what do you expect with mediocre coaching, a 40-year old quarterback, and a quarterback who gets injured and is out for the season? Fans expected better results, now, reality has set in.

What did John the Baptist expect from Jesus? Before he was even an embryo in his mother’s tummy, an angel told his father Zechariah that his son would be the forerunner to the Christ, a fulfillment of a 700-year old prophecy. John knew that he would prepare the hearts of the people of Israel for the coming of the Messiah. God had also told John who that man would be. When he saw the Spirit come down from heaven upon a man, that man was the Son of God. And so, John could point to Jesus of Nazareth and exclaim, “Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”

Now he had his doubts. He was sitting in a dungeon. He had been arrested for preaching against Herod Antipas, who had taken his brother Philip’s wife as his own. John’s ministry was not going the way he expected. Jesus’ ministry not going the way John expected. While in prison, John had heard about the activities of Jesus. This is what raised the question, “**Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?**” John the Baptist had no doubt that Jesus was the Messiah. He has questions about his work. John the Baptist looked and sounded like one of the great Old Testament prophets. From a family of priests, from the tribe of Levi, he lived an ascetic life in the desert, eating and drinking certain foods, preaching a message of repentance and warnings of the wrath of God. Jesus on the other hand came eating and drinking, hanging out with the elite, and with sinners and tax collectors, preaching about forgiveness and comfort and hope. It’s not what John expected. John was waiting for greater evidences of the Messiah’s kingdom, a more impressive sign. He questioned the Savior’s schedule and was growing impatient.

Before we are quick to criticize John, let me ask, is there a psychological reason why John would sink into doubt and misgiving? Absolutely. During the suffering of body and soul and mind, great heroes of faith have had their times of dejection and weakness. Even Elijah had tired of the burden God gave him. Moses himself grew impatient with the LORD. And now John, the forerunner to Christ, was asking, “Where’s my miracle?”

One of the many Christmas movies that will be watched by millions this year as they have for the past 63 years is about a whiskered old man who is asked to replace drunk Santa at Macy’s Christmas parade and is an instant hit. What makes him popular is that he is able to speak many languages, knows just what kids want under the tree, and he calls himself Kris Kringle. He even claims to be the real Santa Claus. But Doris Walker, the special events director of Macy’s, has her doubts. This Kris Kringle needs *A Miracle on 34th Street* to prove to Doris and her daughter that he is who he says he is.

Do you ever find yourself asking God for a miracle, to prove that he is who he says he is? After months of praying for an unchurched family member or friend and inviting them to church to hear God’s Word and nothing happens, one becomes frustrated and impatient. After years of struggling with a specific desire of your own sinful flesh and asking the Lord to take away the temptation, one becomes frustrated and impatient. After weeks of praying for the recovery of a spouse or a loved one who is ill, one becomes frustrated with God’s timing when the individual suddenly dies or continues to suffer. Praying for patience, wisdom,

understanding, the courage to be a better witness of the gospel, and one does not see evidence of these spiritual gifts in their life, one becomes impatient and frustrated with God's timing.

What do you expect to see from God? Should he snap his fingers and immediately give us what we want? Should he swoop down from heaven and carry us and our loved ones away from all evil? Should he immediately set up roadblocks to keep all temptation away so we don't have to struggle? Is this what we expect from our God? And when he appears to just be standing by and allowing these things to happen we wonder, "Where are you? Where is my miracle?" My friends, when God doesn't act the way we expect him to we are susceptible to the great danger of rejecting him, vowing him off forever, then we stop entering his house, our Bibles are never picked up in the home, and what then should we expect to happen when Christ comes again?

"Are the one who was to come or should we expect someone else?" Jesus answers, "Go tell John what you see and hear." Luke records for us that Jesus immediately performed all sorts of miracles with John's disciples witnessing. The blind received sight, the lame are walking, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf are hearing, the dead are raised (Jesus had just raised a widow's son from death in the town of Nain), and the good news is preached to the poor in spirit. Jesus' answer is almost a direct quote from our First Lesson this morning, Isaiah 35. John had sufficient proof. All he had to do was compare the miracles of Jesus to the prophecies about the Christ. God is doing everything he said he would do. What did you expect from the Son of God?

Do you need a miracle? Do you need God to show you that he is still God? Do you need God to show you that he is still near you, even when you reject him and are so frustrated and impatient with him? Here's your miracle: the prophet Isaiah predicted that a virgin would be with child, give birth to a son, and his name would be Immanuel, God with us. That 700-year old promise was kept in the person of Jesus. Here's another miracle for you: that same Jesus endured every single temptation that you have faced in your life, and not once fell victim to the devil's advances, not once did he grow impatient with his Father, always submitting to his will and his timetable, a miracle, because not one of us can do that. Here's another miracle: by his life he earned for you a perfect life free from sin.

Do you need another miracle from God to show that he is still God? What more do you want him to do for you to show you that he does care for you in spite of your frustrations, that he loves you more than anything in this world? Then I point you to the cross. For your sins of frustration with him and impatience with him, he sends his Son to die in your place. He tasks his Son to bear the burden of the fires of hell in your place. And the Son willingly obeys. To us it's a miracle because none of us would offer our sons or daughters to die for someone else, much less people who receive the gift and complain about the giver. But this is what we expect from a God who calls himself **"the gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness."**

Do you need another miracle to prove to you that God is still God, that he still loves you? He who is willing to give up his own Son for you, is also willing to credit your account with Christ's perfect life and his payment for sin. And God gives you all this through a miracle. The miracle of the Word of God – powerful enough to raise the spiritually dead, to open the eyes of the ignorant and unplug the ears of those who didn't want to hear – this is the miracle God performed on you and me. The miracle of the sprinkling of water and the Word – God promises that it washes away sin and gives the gift of eternal life, even to little babies. The miracle of body and blood, supernaturally present with bread and wine, to assure you that your sins are forgiven, that eternal life is yours.

These are the miracles God performs on us daily. Through study of his promises in his Word and receiving his body and blood, and revisiting our baptisms, God takes away your doubt. He reassures you that he still loves you and that he showed that love through his Son's life, death and resurrection.

He continues to show his love to you by answering your prayers in the way that he knows best, in his time, in his way. He promises it. **"We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his good purpose."** (Romans 8:28) What do you expect from a God who loves you? When we wait for strength, for wisdom, for understanding, for deliverance from sickness, depression, guilt, we will say with the Psalmist, **"I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his Word I put my trust."** (130.5)

Not too long ago the surgeons at the University of Louisville Hospital performed a successful double hand transplant. The man who received this gift is going home to spend Christmas with his family. I think that we can expect great things from these surgeons in the future. How much more so that we expect great things from the Great Physician who raised you from death and brought you to life, who opened your eyes and unstopped your ears. What do you expect your God to do?

Amen.