

Matthew 11:2–10  
Gaudete (Advent III)  
Kaiserslautern Ev. Luth. Ch.  
December 11, 2022

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

Dearly bought hearers by the blood of Jesus Christ,

The third Sunday of Advent is called “Gaudete” Sunday. “Gaudete” is the Latin word for “rejoice,” and comes from our Introit, taken from Philippians 4: “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.” The third Sunday of Advent, Gaudete Sunday, is a little different than the other Sundays of Advent. It is a Sunday where the theme is not so much repentance as it is rejoicing. In the midst of this penitential season, we take a moment to rejoice at the coming of Christ. In the midst of repentance over sin, we keep the joy we have in Christ before our eyes. We rejoice even in our suffering and when our expectations about what God should do remain unfulfilled. We rejoice because we trust God will be faithful to His promises.

This morning we hear from John the Baptist sitting in his cold, dark prison cell. That’s hardly a place for rejoicing. John was arrested for preaching against the sexual sins of the political rulers, the Herodians (Matt 14). When John the Baptist heard from prison about all the things Jesus was doing, all the healings and the casting out of demons, John the Baptist sent two of his own disciples to ask Jesus: “Are you the one to come, or shall we look for another?” John the Baptist was asking if Jesus really was the Messiah, because even the greatest of those born of women could have his doubts. And if John the Baptist needed assurance in his suffering, how much more so do we need assurance in our sufferings that Jesus really is who He says He is?

John the Baptist knew who Jesus was, even before they were born. In Luke 1[:41], pregnant Mary went to visit pregnant Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist. When Elizabeth

heard Mary's greeting, baby John leaped in his mother's womb, rejoicing already then in the presence of His Lord. John the Baptist was a relative of Jesus, but unlike Jesus's other relatives, who rejected Him, John the Baptist confessed openly who Jesus is: "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). John the Baptist knew Jesus was the Messiah, the Christ, the one coming into the world to make things right by bearing our sin. John knew these things to be true, yet there he was, sitting in prison.

John the Baptist preached a message of repentance in light of the coming of God's Kingdom, and He preached that God's Kingdom had come in the person of Jesus Christ. John preached judgment to come on the unbelieving world, saying: "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." John preached that Jesus's "winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will clear His threshing floor and gather His wheat into His barn, but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire" (Matt 3:10, 12). Like Christians of every generation since Christ, John the Baptist expected our Lord to usher in His eternal Kingdom soon. As we heard last week, all the signs have been fulfilled, so what is our Lord waiting for? Instead of victory for the Kingdom of God, John the Baptist was imprisoned and eventually beheaded.

But first John the Baptist sent two of his disciples to Jesus to ask: "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" Jesus answered: "Go and tell John what you see and hear: 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." That very hour, John's disciples witnessed Jesus healing people of diseases, plagues, evil spirits, and blindness (Luke 7:21). Jesus confirmed who He is by His works, works that only God could do. As one blind man whom Jesus healed said: "Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the

eyes of a man born blind. If this man [Jesus] were not from God, He could do nothing” (John 9:33). Jesus’s works proved He was sent by God the Father. His miracles were a testimony greater than that of John the Baptist’s preaching. What John pointed to, Jesus actually accomplished: repentance for the forgiveness of sins, and therefore also new life, and salvation.

Jesus’s miracles here are a fulfillment of numerous prophecies in the book of Isaiah, for example, Isaiah 61, the passage Jesus quoted when He began His public ministry: “The 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; to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn.” Jesus’s miracles also point to the restoration He brings. Jesus comes to make things the way they are supposed to be. The blind are supposed to see, the deaf are supposed to hear. Those who can’t walk are meant to be mobile. God wants people who suffer from bodily afflictions to be healed. The dead are supposed to be alive and the poor are to have good news preached to them for a change. As the Messiah, Jesus comes to make all things new, and He began that process in His public ministry of teaching and healing. That’s what John’s disciples witnessed when they met Jesus.

Yet John was stuck behind bars, waiting for someone to bring him good news, to bind up his broken heart and proclaim liberty to the captive and the opening of prison to the bound one. When would the year of the Lord’s favor come for John the Baptist? When would the day of vengeance against John’s enemies arrive? John the Baptist was called to live in a tension that many of you experience as well. If Jesus is all these great things, then why isn’t He helping me right now? Why is the Lord letting these things happen to me? Why don’t I receive answers to my questions or direction for my life? Why does it seem to go worse for me than for other

people? John the Baptist is facing the apparent contradiction between what God says He will do and what seems to be happening. Jesus came to heal, so why are so many people sick? Jesus came to raise the dead, so why are people still dying? There's a certain tension between what we believe according to God's Word and what we see with our very eyes, a tension between what God says and what we experience in our daily lives.

Then Jesus tells the two disciples of John the Baptist: "Blessed is the one who is not offended by me." Why would anyone be offended by Jesus? Well, it turns out lots of people take offense at our Lord, as they always have. Some believe Jesus is too strict and some believe Jesus is too lenient. Some see the message of the cross as foolishness, others see it as a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense. Sinners take offense at Jesus because His ways are not our ways. The world wants power, glory, and triumph but for Jesus, victory comes in unusual places. For Jesus victory must come through suffering and the cross. He had no form or majesty that we should look at Him, and no beauty that we should desire Him (Is. 53:2). What looks like a loss according to our standards is, in fact, a resounding triumph. What looks lowly and despised in the world's eyes is actually exalted. The cross is an instrument of suffering and death, but Jesus turns the cross into the source of our joy and life eternal.

And so it is that we can rejoice in our sufferings, too. In Romans 5[:3-5], the Apostle Paul says that "we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us." As Christians, we rejoice in our sufferings because that's where hope comes from, and in faith, hope looks to God's love for us. Our sufferings draw us closer to Christ Jesus. We suffer with Him that we might be glorified with Him (1 Pet 4:13), knowing that this light momentary

affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond comparison (2 Cor 4:17). Just as Jesus's suffering and death was followed by His resurrection and glorification, so will it go for you as well. The difficulty is that this is a hope in something to come, not something you can see right now. But God is faithful. He will keep His promises.

So, rejoice! Gaudete! Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice! Rejoice in the Lord even when you are suffering or things don't make sense. Rejoice when reality doesn't seem to match God's promises. Rejoice when the Lord's ways are not your ways, because you know that the will of God in Christ Jesus is always good. Rejoice in the miracles of Jesus as you await that great miracle, the resurrection of your own body from the dead. Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice! In the name of Jesus, Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. We stand for the Offertory.