**Jesus & All Pastors**

**Matthew 11:2‑11**

**&**

**1 Corinthians 4:1-5**

Gaudete – 3rd Sunday in Advent

12.13.2020

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

Gaudete Sunday – Rejoice in the Lord Sunday – the 3rd Sunday in Advent.

John is in prison, how do we rejoice about that? He’s struggling emotionally with his situation. Sure, he made the prophecy about having to decrease while Jesus must increase. But now that he is in prison, that decreasing is not exactly pleasant. Now he is experiencing some doubt.

He is probably afraid for his life. Let’s face it, Herod’s present wife hates John. John made a point of calling her and Herod out, calling them to repentance for their sinfulness against God’s covenant of marriage because she had been Herod’s brother’s wife.

Now he is in prison for calling them specifically to repentance. And, everybody knows that Herodias, the wife, wants John killed.

John is struggling with doubt. He is wondering if Jesus really is the One that John Himself had been claiming He was. If He truly is, then maybe Jesus can get him out of this pickle? After all, John was only doing what the Holy Spirit moved him to do and say. He was following God’s instructions. If he is faithful, why is God letting him have such troubles?

You know what, this sounds exactly like the same problem many pastors deal with. Should they call sinners to repentance? Someone might get angry! Nobody would behead him, but people get angry. People might complain that his calling sinners to repentance is chasing people away. If people are chased away, the giving will go down. If the giving goes down, what will happen to the church?

In the meantime, the pastor is worried about the souls entrusted to his care, worried about their eternal well-being. He hears of other pastors who proclaim other things. They are more “tolerant,” even pastors in his own church body. So doubts assail him, “Maybe I can water things down a little bit. It is 2020, we are going through COVID, the times have changed, do I really need to be so inflexible on what Scripture declares? Isn’t there a little wiggle room?”

“Jesus, won’t you give a bit more guidance here? Are you the One who is to come, or shall we seek another?”

While it is not our Old Testament text for today, faithful pastors know the Word of God which came to Ezekiel.

 “Son of man, go to the house of Israel and speak with My words to them. 5 For you are not being sent to a people of unintelligible speech or difficult language, but to the house of Israel…” (Ez. 3:4-5)

 A few verses later, we read this: Now at the end of seven days the word of the Lord came to me, saying, “Son of man, I have appointed you as a watchman for the house of Israel; whenever you hear a word from My mouth, warn them from Me. When I say to the wicked, ‘You will certainly die,’ and you do not warn him or speak out to warn the wicked from his wicked way so that he may live, that wicked person shall die for wrongdoing, but his blood I will require from your hand. However if you have warned the wicked and he does not turn from his wickedness or from his wicked way, he shall die for wrongdoing, but you have saved yourself. Again, when a righteous person turns away from his righteousness and commits sin, and I place an obstacle before him, he will die; since you have not warned him, he shall die in his sin, and his righteous deeds which he has done shall not be remembered; but his blood I will require from your hand. However, if you have warned the righteous person that the righteous is not to sin, and he does not sin, he shall certainly live because he took warning; and you have saved yourself.” (Ez. 3:16-21)

Seems pretty clear, if the pastor lets people continue in their sin, they will be eternally lost – and HE WILL BE HELD ACCOUNTABLE BEFORE GOD on the last day if he does not speak out to them about their sin. He is the watchman who hears the Word from the mouth of God and is to warn the people.

But if he warns them, if he declares God Word, there is no wiggle room. Maybe if he just avoids things? He wrestles with himself. He really wants to keep the people happy; he truly does not like conflict and disagreement. So, he reasons in his own mind, “It is no big deal, that was just in Ezekiel, that’s the Old Testament, right? It doesn’t really apply to us today.”

But then God speaks to pastors in His word to the young pastor Timothy through Paul’s pen.

*I solemnly exhort you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; correct, rebuke, and exhort, with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when they will not tolerate sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance with their own desires, and they will turn their ears away from the truth and will turn aside to myths.* (2 Tim. 4:1-4)

When it is in season or out of season – when it is popular or unpopular – preach the Word. Or, as it says in our epistle lesson from first Corinthians, “Stewards are to be trustworthy.” Maybe another translation helps us understand – it reads, “stewards are to be faithful.” Stewards are those sent in under the authority, in the stead of another. Trustworthy pastors, pastors faithful to their Master, cannot always do what they would like to do. They must do only what they are instructed to do. They are under authority; and will answer to another Who is far greater.

As we learn in Mark’s Gospel, John *appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.* (Mk. 1:4) That is the purpose of all preaching, to lead people to repentance for the forgiveness of sins. John helps us still further, showing where forgiveness comes, he points to Jesus and declares of Him, “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” (Jn. 1:26)

John is a prophet, and like all prophets throughout the Scriptures, he points to Jesus. He spoke of himself as nothing, and Christ as all things. He points to Jesus as the One who was before him, even though John was born six months before Jesus. He was before John, for Jesus is the Word of God, the 2nd Person of the Trinity, without beginning or end, who created and gave life to John.

Although John is a prophet, he is still in human flesh. There is doubt in John, brought on by the fact that in human flesh he would like this life to be long, without pain and suffering, without imprisonment. There is some fear in him as well. In what way will Herodias want his life to be terminated? Will it be painful?

Even before his imprisonment, the task of calling sinners to repentance for the forgiveness of sins was a daunting task. He was questioned about what he was doing, asked why he was doing it, told that he should not be doing it that way.

He had one job, calling sinners to repentance for the forgiveness of sins, in so doing, pointing them to the One who is coming, Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Right now some of you may be thinking, “I know it is Advent still, but we are close to Christmas, do we have to deal with this subject? Can’t we at least have some Christmas hymns in the service?”

Guess what, faithful pastors are just like John. They have doubts. Does it do any good to preach, teach, and administer the sacraments? Are people changed? Life in this world – life in 2020 is anything but easy – maybe ministry should be different? Fears abound in their hearts and minds about many things. And the job has not gotten any easier, there are always people questioning what the pastor does.

But the job remains the same as it was for John. God’s ministers are called to be trustworthy, they are called to be faithful stewards of the mysteries of God. Like John, all they can do is point sinner to Christ, the Lamb of God, Who takes away the sins of the world – Who takes away their sin.

Interestingly, baptism, the Lord’s Supper, and the Word of Christ proclaimed are those things which are the mysteries of God. What are these things? They are things by which the forgiveness of sins, purchased with the innocent suffering and death of Jesus, the Lamb of God, are dispensed to His children.

Trustworthy, faithful pastors today do nothing more than John did, they point to Jesus, calling sinners to repentance for the forgiveness of sins in Him.

You dearly beloved of God are those to whom Christ has sent His ministers, His prophets, His John. He is calling you to repentance for the forgiveness of sins. He is pointing you to Jesus, God’s Christ, the very Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

You and I struggle in our faith at time, especially when we consider the deeds of Christ in that time when before He was crucified, resurrected, and ascended. We wonder why He does not do such things now. We struggle with the things in this world which cause us grief and pain.

But He still comes to us. He is the Word proclaimed into our ears, we hear His Word and we are granted forgiveness and life. We are strengthened in faith so that our eyes are opened to walk by faith and not by sight. As we again come to receive forgiveness, to eat and drink at His table, though dead in trespasses and sins, we are raised up to a new life.

Jesus speaks about you in today’s Gospel, “Blessed is the one who is not offended by Me!” So it is that Christ comes to you again and blesses you! Gaudete – Rejoice in the Lord always. Yes, thanks be to God in Christ Jesus our Lord! Amen.