**The Last Prophet:**

**John Imprisoned,**

**Pointing Disciples to Christ!**

**Matthew 11:1-19**

Mid-week Advent 4 – 12.21.2022

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

*When Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in their cities. 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?”*

John sent his disciples to Christ, but where was he when he did so? In prison! Why was he in prison? Because he had offended the wrong person with his preaching of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, and pointing to Jesus as the Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

John had offended royalty. Herod had seized John and bound him and put him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, because John had been saying to him, “It is not lawful for you to have her.” Herod had taken to himself, his brother’s wife, Herodias.

John was a faithful proclaiming God’s word, he called them to repent – Herodias was to go back to her husband – to repent for the forgiveness of sin. She did not want to, and she hated John for speaking God’s truth.

Dear friends, proclaiming the truth does that, it offends people. Interestingly, it is plainly revealed in Scripture that such is the case.

As we read through the Old Testament, the prophets were persecuted for proclaim God’s truth – calling the Israelites to repentance for the forgiveness of sins – pointing forward to the coming of God’s Christ.

In our Epistle lesson, this is made abundantly clear.

*For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.”*

*Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.* (1 Cor. 1:18-25)

In the Greek, the preaching of Christ crucified is a σκάνδαλον. Did you hear the word? Yes, you can hear that our English word scandalized comes from it, stumbling block is how it is translated in our Epistle.

John’s in prison! He is languishing there, knowing that his end is probably near. Indeed, Herodias’ daughter would dance in front of Herod who would be so entranced with he that he would foolishly offer her anything she wanted. Her mother, in her desire to silence John, prompted her to ask for John’s head on a platter. The earthly wages bestowed upon a trustworthy steward for faithfully proclaiming repentance for the forgiveness of sins –pointing to God’s Christ.

As we get closer to Christmas, it is hard not to think of the familiar passages of Scripture that we had to memorize for the Christmas program. Remember the angelic proclamation to the Judean shepherds? “Unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Savoir who is Christ the Lord.”

Already the angels were proclaiming Christ. Christ means ‘Messiah,’ ‘anointed one.’ Christ was sent by God, anointed for a specific task, as Paul makes known to us. To speak of Christ is to speak of the Crucified One. Paul wants to know nothing except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.

When people are hurting and worried, like John in prison, is Christ crucified good new? John pointed his disciples to Jesus. His disciples knew the Scriptures, what we call the Old Testament, they knew that John was pointing forward to the promised coming Messiah, God’s Christ. So, he sent them to Jesus to ask Him if He is the One.

The world is enticing. It is alluring to consider the other things in this life than the purity of God’s Word and the truth of God’s Christ.

What is spirit of Christmas? Doing our part and volunteering somewhere?

What is spirit of Christmas? Doing our part for social justice?

What is spirit of Christmas? Doing our part to make sure all people, even those less fortunate have gift?

What is spirit of Christmas? Doing our part to make sure all mouths are fed?

What is spirit of Christmas? Gathering with family, hopefully with all hatchets buried, and enjoy food – fellowship – games – conversations and all that goes with it?

None of those things is bad! In fact, in Christ Jesus we should already be involved in such things. Helping our neighbor should be a part of our daily lives, we shouldn’t need the ‘spirit of Christmas’ to put us into a ‘help-your-neighbor’ mood. None of those however, is the Spirit of Christmas.

John, imprisoned points us to Christ. He calls us to repentance for the forgiveness of sins – repentance for our failures to have a Christmas spirit – the Spirit of Christ 365 days a year.

We are in Christ. His Spirit is to reign in us always. We are to love God – abide in His Word and will at all times – praying without ceasing, studying His Scripture, and proclaiming Christ to others. And, we are to love our neighbor – looking out for their good, and doing what we are able to assist those in need every day. And, as we desire only their good, proclaiming Christ to others whenever we are able.

John, imprisoned, pointed his disciples to Christ. No steel bars encage us, but too often we are also imprisoned by our own fears, and our desire to be at peace with the world and the culture around us.

Repent for the forgiveness of sins. Hear John point you to Christ.

Christ opens your eyes to see the truth of the Gospel, that in Him you have forgiveness.

Christ frees you, building you up to walk by faith.

Christ cleanses you from the sinfulness rotting you.

Christ opens your ears to hear the good news that He is your Savior.

Christ raises you from the watery death of baptism to new life in Him through daily contrition and repentance.

While you have been poor, you are now rich in God’s grace, yours in Christ Jesus.

What a privilege to gather and celebrate the joy that is ours in Christ Jesus our Lord. This Babe whose birth we will soon celebrate is none other than God Incarnate – God in our flesh – who came to free from sin, grant us peace with God, and give us new life.

I pray that you would boast my friends, doing so boldly – boast in the Lord Jesus Christ – your wisdom from God, your righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption. Amen.