

Isaiah 35:1-10
Psalm 146:5-10
James 5:7-10
Matthew 11:2-11

Sermon December 15th, 2019

Jesus Is Indeed the One Who is to Come!

Last week we heard John's call to repentance as he prepares the way for Jesus to come into our lives. Passionately proclaiming a message of a person who will come and baptize us not with water but with the Holy Spirit. A person who will cleanse us and our world from brokenness. A person who will liberate John's people from Roman oppression.

When Jesus arrives at John's feet to be baptized John recognizes Jesus as the one who is to come. In fact, John struggles to understand why Jesus the messiah would need to be baptized by John. Shouldn't it be the other way around.

Fast forward a few chapters in John's story and we see that he is in prison wondering if he baptized the wrong messiah. Forget that Jesus has performed all these miracles by this point. John's own suffering is making it more difficult for him to see or at least hear the good things Jesus is doing to change the world.

How often does our hope turn into doubt when we face suffering in our lives? How often does our suffering make it more difficult for us to see the good things God is doing in our lives?

One example that comes to mind for me when I reflect on these questions. Especially, as we get closer to Christmas and see images of the baby Jesus pop up everywhere. Is the joy we experience at the birth of a child. For many of us out there holding our baby or our grandchild or niece or nephew for the first time brings great joy. We give thanks for this amazing gift of life. Maybe, we even think of all the wonderful possibilities of who this child could become. We don't usually think so much about the challenges of raising a child, at least in that precious moment. Like the Christmas story where Mary sits and ponders the miracle she has just witnessed. We too, ponder the miracle we have just witnessed.

It is hard to imagine anyone feeling any other way than pure joy at the birth of their child. Well, some women suffer from something called post partum depression, which is a state of depression that comes after giving birth to a child. Now I don't personally know this experience so I can only talk from a third-party observer, but when I have seen people close to me suffer with this I see that this depression makes it very difficult for them to see joy in this moment. Or in other words their suffering makes it more difficult for them to see this good thing that God has done in their life.

For someone who has experienced depression on more than one occasion it is incredibly hard to see the good things God is doing in one's life when suffering from depression. Often times our mind focuses on the negative thoughts that override our minds. Turning our focus on the darkness instead of the light. Even when we may be experiencing positive changes. Like getting married or getting that job that you always wanted or reconnecting with an old friend or your sports' team finally won the championship after all these years. We struggle to see the joy in these experiences, because of our depression. Because of our suffering.

How hard is it to see the good things God is doing in our lives when we are suffering?

This is only one example that comes to mind when I hear John's struggle in our gospel this morning. Another example that comes to mind is a friend of mine who lost his wife right before he was planning to retire. All the dreams and possibilities people have when they retire. Travelling. Seeing the grandchildren more. Fulfilling all those things on one's wish list that they were too busy to even look at when raising children and working full time. For most people retirement is a time of excitement and new possibilities. Unfortunately, for my friend all this was hindered by grief. All changed by the suddenness of the tragedy of the death of his spouse. He struggled a lot seeing the good things God was doing in his life through his children, grandchildren, friendships, and faith.

For John and his followers. They were sick of suffering under Roman Oppression. John was hopeful and excited that Jesus will make things different. That Jesus is here to transform the system into something just and filled with God's love. Then John is arrested, and from prison struggles to see what Jesus is doing.

Suffering of any kind is hard to bear, and can make it more difficult for us to see the love of God touching our lives. Well, Jesus sends a message back to John. Jesus says "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them." Or in other words, I am changing the world one act of loving kindness at a time. I am fulfilling the promises you heard from Isaiah. Patience John.

Like John, Jesus reassures us in times of suffering that indeed Jesus is the One Who is to come. Jesus is our messiah who loves us. Heals us. Redeems us. Gives us new life. Calls us to follow him reflecting this love to others. Even during the waiting and suffering.

Today we lit the candle of joy. The pink candle that stands out from the other candles. Reminding us that in the midst of the purple, the darker shaded candles, that represent that waiting, suffering, patience, stands a lighter pink candle. A candle in the midst of Advent that is pink to help us see that even in a period of waiting and suffering God is doing good things in our lives and in our world.

Sometimes, like John, we need a reminder of what good things God is doing in our lives, and what God's future promises will do for our world like we see in Isaiah. A kind of reversal to what we watch on the News on an evening after supper. A positive inventory of what God is doing in our world to give us hope and joy. Whether it is coming across a story in scripture that helps us see our suffering in a different light or reminds us of the healing and redemption God promises us. Or a worship service where we feel God's comfort and love in the midst of our suffering. Or words of wisdom from a friend that gets us to see our situation from a whole new perspective. Or a feeling of peace that we get from sitting in prayerful reflection. Or the support of a faith community during a difficult time. Or the coming together of people from different faith traditions to reflect God's unity, peace, and love in the world. Helping the poor. Building bridges. Reconciling relationships. Or a miracle of new life that gives us hope for our future.

This hope that we find in our gospel this morning as Jesus points to God's love for us when we struggle to see it.

How many of us have a story we could share where in the midst of our suffering something miraculous happened? We finally heard God's voice. We finally bore witness to his love. Feeling reassured that God is very much there with us. Walking with us. Healing us. Redeeming us. Breathing new life into us. And as James recalls, sometimes gently reminding us that it is a patient process.

Loving God, we give thanks that you walk with us when we suffer. When we start to doubt your love point us to the places in our lives where you are at work loving us, healing us, and redeeming us. And help us be a support and love for others who are struggling to see your joy during this Advent season. In Jesus name we pray, **Amen**.