

Luke 7:18-28 - “A Lion in Lamb’s Clothing”

Pr. Kurt A. Van Fossan - Advent 3C 2021

A couple years ago when I preached on our Gospel reading about John the Baptist’s question to Jesus, as to whether He was *“the one who is to come, or shall we look for another,”* I mentioned that even though God’s prophets, apostles and pastor’s are not free from all their doubts and fears, it was probably not so much John who was questioning if Jesus was the promised Savior but some of his disciples. After all, John was there at Jesus’ baptism and saw the Holy Spirit descend on Jesus like a dove. And John heard God the Father’s voice from heaven say, *“This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased”* (Mt 3:17).

So, even though John was at the time in prison for confronting King Herod with his sin of adultery, I think John was more concerned for his disciples than himself. John didn’t want his disciples to doubt in Jesus as the promised Savior or to misunderstand why Jesus was not coming to rescue John from prison. Therefore, to answer John and his disciples question about Jesus, John sends *“two of his disciples”* to Jesus, who was happy to answer their question.

The same is true for each one of us when we begin to question our Lord’s presence with us and His promise of salvation, especially during times of trouble in our lives. The best place to go to relieve us from our doubts and fears is to the Word of God, Jesus Christ. Listen again to Jesus’ response to the question about whether He was *“the one who is to come, or shall we look for another.”*

Jesus’ response to John’s question reminds me of God’s response to Job when Job, during his prolonged suffering, questioned God’s power to save him. In both cases, the LORD doesn’t explain the reason for allowing John or Job to suffer. Instead He points both of them back to His Word and what He had done in the past, to strengthen their faith in God to save them. In our text Jesus told the two disciples John sent, *“Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them.”*

These were the very things that the OT prophets said the Messiah/promised Savior would do when He came. So, Yes, Jesus is *“the one who is to come,”* and we need not look for another. But there was one significant difference between what happened to Job and what happened to John after the LORD responded to their questions. Job’s fortunes in THIS life were restored, but John’s were not. Instead, John was beheaded and given his eternal inheritance in heaven.

This important difference reminds us that the main reason the Son of God was born into our flesh was not to give us more TEMPORARY gifts in this life, but to give us a share in His ETERNAL inheritance in the life to come. All the good things the Lord blesses us with in this world are simply tastes of the eternal blessings He promises in the world to come for all who trust in Him. Conversely, all our suffering in this world is simply a taste of the eternal suffering God promises to all who refuse to repent of their sinful ways, and trust in Him.

How would Jesus fulfill His promises; as a ferocious lion or as a sacrificial lamb? Actually as both—as the Lion of Judah in Lamb’s clothing. *“And blessed is the one who is not offended by”* our Lion Savior in Lamb’s clothing.

John the Baptizer, who was called by God to “*prepare the way of the Lord,*” carried out his calling not only through his preaching and baptism, but also through his death. Think about how John’s death pointed to Jesus. Instead of coming to rescue John by getting rid of Herod, Jesus appeared to be a helpless lamb, allowing John to continue to suffer, to be beheaded, and to even let his head be displayed on a platter before others.

Who else do you know of who, instead of coming to His rescue, Jesus appeared to be a helpless lamb, allowing Him to suffer and die a horrible death on display before others? Jesus Himself, the sinless Son of God in the flesh. This was the Lamb part of Jesus’ work for our salvation—His passive obedience. He allowed Himself to be crucified so that our sins would be punished according to God’s righteous judgment. The Lion part of Jesus’ work of salvation became visible through His resurrection from the dead in victory over our sins, death and all the forces of evil.

Where is this Lion in Lamb’s clothing, Jesus Christ, at work today? One important place is through God’s people like you and me, especially when we share the message of salvation in Jesus Christ with others through our words and actions. What do you suppose sends a clearer and more powerful message to others when it comes to the main purpose of Jesus’ death and resurrection? Is it when we rejoice in the Lord only during the times He delivers us from our temporary suffering in this world? Or, is it when we “*rejoice in the Lord always,*” even during times of suffering and death, because we know that the main reason the Son of God became flesh in Jesus Christ, and continues to come to us today through His Word and Sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion, is not to give us more temporary gifts in this life but to give us a share in His eternal inheritance in the life to come?

This second way of “*rejoicing in the Lord always,*” even during times of suffering, certainly doesn’t sound appealing to our impatient, ‘want-it-now’ flesh, but it is the way which points most clearly and powerfully to Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection as the way of eternal salvation for all who trust in Him. Help us, Lord, to rejoice in You on this Third Sunday in Advent and always.

[Children’s Sermon] In Luke chapter 10, Jesus says that He sends us out into this world “*as lambs in the midst of wolves*” (Luke 10:3) [Put on lambskin looking coat]. One of the things God wants us to do as His little lambs in this world full of wolves is to not be afraid to tell all people (including the wolves) the Good News about Jesus, even if the wolves threaten to eat us if we do.

The reason we don’t need to be afraid is because the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, who died on a cross to pay for our sins also rose for the dead to show us that He is stronger than our sins, death, and all the wolves out there who want eat us.

But, even if God let some wolves or bad people out their kill us, and our life in this world comes to an end, does that mean that we would be dead? No. For us who are baptized and/or believe in Jesus as our Savior, our death is like me taking off this sheepskin coat and leaving it in this world. But where do we go? We go to heaven.

For now, however, I’m going to give you all a lambskin looking scarf to wear in this cold world, as you tell others about Jesus. But when Jesus takes us to heaven we will happily leave such things behind, because the temperature and everything else in heaven (including us) will be perfect!

All glory be to God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.