

Third Sunday in Advent – 2025

Isaiah 35:1-10

James 5:7-11

Matthew 11:2-15

What am I doing here? Have you ever said that to yourself when you were in a place that you didn't want to be – either physically or spiritually? What am I doing *here*? I don't belong here. That's one way to describe a crisis. We make light of the proverbial "midlife" crisis but for some folks it is very real. Some go through an "existential crisis" where they are deeply confused about the meaning of life. The death of a spouse will certainly bring about an emotional crisis – the loss, the pain can be debilitating. Being in jail is a crisis. What am I doing here? God's kingdom was being inaugurated and His greatest prophet was in jail. What am I doing here? John the Baptist was zealous for the law and it landed him in jail. John the Baptist was a righteous arbiter of truth, an unabashed defender of God's commands and John the Baptist was in jail. What am I doing here? The Lord's Christ, the long-promised Messiah, was revealing Himself to His people Israel and John was behind bars like a dog.

A faith crisis; the heart of man is subject to the ebb and flow of life. Frank Sinatra sang this line: "You're riding high in April, shot down in May." Yep, that's life. Roses one day, dandelions the next. "I've been a puppet, a pauper, a pirate, a poet, a pawn, and a king." Most of your heroes are just men, just women. The glamorous faces and the seemingly put-together lives are sometimes trainwrecks behind closed doors. Personally, I'm more comfortable with the rank and file than those who want to fly close to the sun. How many of y'all know what a crisis feels like? The Baptist's heart wasn't made of titanium. It was flesh and blood just like yours and mine. What am I doing here? I can imagine John thinking exactly that. King Herod had taken his brother's wife for his own and that is not allowed in the Torah and John said as much. For that, John was in prison. Herod was defying the living God and John said as much. For that John was in prison.

This man *is* heroic *and* he was in crisis. John had seen the Lord's Christ. John had baptized the Messianic King. John had seen the Holy Spirit descend on Jesus in the form of a dove (Mark 1:10). In humility, as Jesus came to him to be baptized, John said: "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" (Matthew 3:14). John *knew* that Jesus was the One. "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). John had announced to everyone within earshot: "He must increase, I must decrease" (John 3:30). I am not worthy to carry His sandals (Matthew 3:11). John *knew*... here is God's atoning sacrifice; here is the One who brings the eternal reign of the Almighty. The Father had revealed all of this John in an unmistakable way. And John was in prison. What am I doing here?

Herod defies the living God and I am in jail. John was in crisis. Do you think that crisis doesn't come to the heroic, doesn't visit the brave and the strong? No one is above difficulty. No one is immune to pain and hardship and suffering and loss and guilt and shame and isolation and confusion and personal crisis. I love my faith, *the* faith, the faith that God has given to me and to you and to Christians across this globe. I'm so grateful to be a believer. Conviction; have you felt it swell in your heart? Have you ever felt it dissipate, turn to mist, as though God was hiding His face from you? In prison, John hurt. What did John need? This is important for you to

identify... what did John need? He sent word to his cousin, his relative, his Lord: “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?” (Matthew 11:3).

This is the Third Sunday in Advent, traditionally known by its Latin name, *Gaudete*, which means rejoice. This is “rejoice” Sunday. The color for this Sunday is rose (pink), a lighter shade than the purple, to capture a brief reprieve from this penitential season. What causes you to rejoice? In the deepest sense, what is the catalyst for pure joy? If you were feeling as parched spiritually as a barren desert, what would bring the water of refreshment to your soul? Have you known God’s glory? Has His revelation of pure love ever washed over your heart? Have you seen the wonder, in your mind’s eye, of a Savior who is crucified, taking your sin, dying in your place as an act of atonement, sacrifice, an act of self-giving that is *entirely* for you? To claim you as His own, the eternal Word was made man. This holy and good and omnipotent author of Creation decided that His glory should reside in a Virgin, that He should be a fully human child in her womb. The mystery of limitless power residing meekly, vulnerable, in a Virgin’s womb – to come to you, to restore your fallen humanity, to claim you for the Father – has that truth ever brought joy to your spirit? “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice” (Philippians 4:4). What brings joy? Whatever it is, John needed it.

When Jesus heard John’s question, what did *He* think? Oh, my poor, lame cousin! Too bad that John’s not as strong as I thought he was. Is that it? Do you believe that that was our Lord’s reaction to John’s question? Was Jesus disappointed? Did He lament choosing John as the One who would prepare His way? When you’re blue, spiritually blue, what do you need? The God who loves you, who sees you, who knows that you’re blue, does He send a messenger with good news? “How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, ‘Your God reigns!’” (Isaiah 52:7). Jesus sent John’s disciples back to him with good news. The wilderness and dry land of John’s prison cell was about to bloom with the crocus of the gospel (Isaiah 35:1). Jesus knew exactly what to tell John. Jesus knew exactly how to comfort John. “Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees” (Isaiah 35:4). The signs! Jesus told John about the signs.

One of my favorite film characters is Eliza Doolittle from *My Fair Lady*. She’s a hoot and she’s relatable and she’s deeper than expected. She sings an exasperated song about wanting action, proof, a demonstration of love and not idle talk. “If you’re in love, Show me! Tell me no dreams filled with desire. If you’re on fire, Show me! Sing me no song! Tell me no rhyme! Don’t waste my time, Show me! Haven’t your arms hungered for mine? Please don’t ‘expl’in,’ Show me! Don’t wait until wrinkles and lines Pop out all over my brow, Show me now!” Show me; Jesus was performing the signs promised of the Messiah and John was told. “Go and tell John what you hear and see: 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 the good news preached to them” (Matthew 11:4-5). Jesus was showing everyone – your God has come, to claim you, to inaugurate His kingdom, to vanquish sin and death and restore broken creation, to re-create fallen humanity by death and resurrection. Miracles! Signs! Proof! Your God *has* come, there is no other, rejoice!

Has He not shown you? By opening the eyes of your heart so that you may see the glory of God in the face of Christ, has He not shown you? What has He shown you? The beauty of forgiveness. The power of His truth. The harmony of the Scriptures. Has He not shown you? Does your heart not burn at the Word of His resurrection? Does your spirit not soar as you hear of the humility, the faith of a fellow believer who suffers yet gives all glory to God? Jesus said: “Blessed is the one who is not offended by me” (Matthew 11:6). His tactics (the Word and the Sacraments), are we offended by them and so try to dream up new tactics for His church? His appearance, His cross, His lowliness – are we offended or do we rejoice? The company He keeps, the sinners He forgives, the blessings He bestows on the undeserving – are we offended or is that a source of joy for us? I know who is with us in crisis. I know who it is that strengthens my weak hands and my feeble knees. I thank God for His Word. He has shown me His glory and I know that our lives are secure in Him, for there is no crisis bigger than His cross, there is no crisis bigger than His empty tomb, there is no crisis bigger than His love. What are we doing here? We’re hearing His Word and we rejoice.