**Matthew 11:2-15 December 11, 2022**

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

Our text for this morning comes from the Gospel of Matthew the 11th chapter here re-reading these words. “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” This is our text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Repent. That was the message of John the Baptist. That was the way that the people were to be prepared for Christ’s coming. Last week we looked at this great prophet, yelling out in the wilderness to the people a message of repentance. He was pointing to the one that was to come, who would baptize the people with the Holy Spirit and fire, who would bring wrath upon the unrepentant and the sinful. It certainly seemed that the expectation for Jesus was that He would come in with a fury, righting the wrongs of the religious leaders. For as John himself said, the axe was laid to the root of the tree. Time was growing short, He was coming and the people had better be ready. But a few chapters later, where do we find this hero of the faith? In our Gospel lesson for this morning, now that Jesus has begun his earthly ministry and has been baptized by John, wouldn’t we expect to find him as Jesus’ right-hand man? The second in command so to speak? John and Jesus would go side by side to the crowds, John setting them up, pointing to Jesus as this person that He was talking about, the one who was to come, and Jesus knocking them down, the fulfillment of John’s preaching, the proof that all that John was saying was true, and that He was the Christ, the Savior of the world who had finally come. But that’s not where we find John. John instead, is in a prison cell. John had been thrown in prison by Herod, and if you have read ahead in your Bibles you know that our good friend and great prophet John the Baptist does not receive the happiest of endings. And I’m sure John had an expectation of how things were going to go in His ministry. And he also thought he knew what Jesus ministry would look like. And so, for that reason, he reaches out to Jesus by his own disciples and asks a very simple question. “Jesus, are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?”

In a way, it’s a test. And that’s not so different from other sections of the Bible. People have always been testing God and His power. Think of Moses standing before Pharoah when he had to prove the power of God by showing great and miraculous deeds. Or perhaps remember The prophets of Baal who went head to head with Elijah to see whose God was more powerful. The Pharisees were constantly wondering who Jesus was and how he had the power and authority to do the things He did. And even the disciples seemed split on this issue. When Jesus asks them who the crowds were saying that He was, they replied with, some say you are Elijah or some other great prophet. Even for them, they were unsure. John the Baptist here is simply trying to clarify if Jesus is who He says He is, and who the prophets foretold. If anything, John is looking for proof.

And that is a request that doesn’t seem too unreasonable. After all, in this day and age, we are constantly asked to prove that we are who we say we are. Think about all the times that you have to show your driver’s license when using a credit card or writing a check at a store. You go to the doctor and have to show your I.D. If you’re tech savey, and are used to checking e-mails or buying things online you have to constantly put in your password to prove that you are who you say you are, and are not a thief. They are always sending you a code that you have to put in from your cell phone, proving that you are you. If you’ve ever been pulled over the first thing you’re asked for is your driver’s license and **proof** that you have insurance. We are constantly proving things about ourselves, and not just our identities. Really with any employment you are proving that you can do the job that you’ve been hired to do, with the work that you put in. Proof is not foreign to us at all, and John’s request wasn’t going over any line. He was simply wanting clarification to make sure that Jesus was the promised Messiah.

John was looking for a Messiah who was coming with fury and might, a Savior of power and “fire and brimstone” so to speak. And when Jesus did not fit that picture, John wanted to make sure that Jesus was the Messiah. We all have certain expectations and want proof to believe that God is who He says He is. Especially in our culture today, there are many who share the views of Thomas, the disciple who doubted that Jesus had risen from the dead. He famously stated that unless he put his finger in the holes in Jesus hands and feet and his hand in the hole in his side he would **never** believe. Unless Thomas received proof from Jesus himself, He would not have faith of any kind, or believe that Jesus could have risen from the dead. False expectations lead to disastrous results. And requiring proof is not a harmful thing when it comes to buying something on the internet or using a check. But it is a very dangerous thing when it comes to God. It was Jesus himself who quotes to Satan, when Satan is tempting him in the wilderness, that we are not to put God to the test. Yet we too often do just that. We demand proof from God, proof that He cares about us and proof that He takes care of us. And instead of looking at John’s message of preparation for Christ’s coming at Christmas and his inevitable Second Coming in judgment, which is to Repent of our sins and look to God for forgiveness, we instead look to God, to instead prove to us, that He has the power to forgive. We look to God, insisting that He follow our rules and prove himself to us! And in those moments, we fall into the same trap that Satan uses over and over and over again, we have again put something before God. We have put our own need for proof and our own expectations of who God is and who He should be before the promises of God in His Word. In those moments our own knowledge has superseded God’s Word and His Will. We put God to the test. We insist on having our own way. And we do not trust in Him or His promises. And too often, we fail to see the proof that sits right in front of our own eyes.

Jesus responds to John, and He does not lash out against him. Jesus does not look with anger towards John, but answers him very plainly. Because the proof of who Jesus is, is in the work of His ministry. If there was ever a time when the saying “Actions speak louder than words” fit perfectly, this is that time. Jesus, when asked by John if He is truly the Christ, the one who was to come into this world, the promised Savior and Messiah, points to the miraculous works that He is doing. His evidence for being the Lord is proven in our Old Testament lesson this morning from Isaiah. Isaiah writes that when the Lord comes with vengeance, He will come and save us. And the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped, That the lame man shall leap like a deer and the tongue of the mute will sing for joy. Jesus points to the fact that He is going out into the fallen and sinful creation that has been distorted from its perfection by the fall into sin. This fallen creation where there are those who are blind, deaf, mute, and lame and that He is restoring creation by His omnipotent power. Jesus tells John, to hear the reports of those who have seen Jesus working in His ministry, the reports of the blind who have received their sight. Of the lame who now are walking. Of the lepers who have been cleansed and brought back to society. Of the fact that He even has power over the dead, and that the dead are being raised up. And finally, that the poor have good news preached to them. That the poor have the “Gospel” preached to them, that their sins are forgiven and new life is being given to them by the Son of God who has come into this world to take away it’s sin and buy it back from Satan and his lies.

The miraculous works of healing were the proof for the crowds, for John, and for everyone to know without a shadow of a doubt, that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God. But what about us? Where is our proof? How can we know for sure that Jesus cares about us, takes care of us, heals our wounds, feeds our hunger, quenches our thirst, and forgives our sins? The proof of all those things, and the proof for us that Jesus is the Christ can all be found in one place. His Word. God reveals to us the work of His Son through the work of the Holy Spirit that creates faith in our hearts in His Holy Word. Through the preaching and teaching of His Word we see the proof of who Jesus is, we hear the eye witness accounts of what Jesus did in His ministry, showing his omnipotent power and taking care of the needs of those who came to Him. We can see that He did fulfill the work that He set out to do. That He fulfilled the prophecies of the one who was coming to give up His life for the sins of the entire world. And our proof that Jesus still cares about us today is right here in His house. Our proof is the fact that He has given to us His body and blood to eat and drink for the forgiveness of our sins. Our proof is that here in God’s house, in the waters of Baptism, he has adopted us as His children and heirs of the priceless treasure of heaven, which is the eternal life He won for us on Calvary’s cross. Jesus proved his love for us in that while we were still members of the fallen creation here on Earth. While we were still covered in sin and enemies of God, hostile and against him, rebelling and fighting against God. He came down to Earth as a child, and took on human flesh. He came to this world in order that He would die on the cross to take away our sins. He came so that He would die for us, even though we were not worthy of redemption. That is the depth of Jesus’s love for us. That is the amazing love that proves that we are His children.

For John there was no more need of proof. We do not hear much else about John during His life, but we know that in this moment, Jesus dispelled any doubt by pointing to the work that He was doing to restore the fallen and sinful creation of this world. And we too will look for proof in our live. We will fall into the traps and snares of the devil, to put our own expectations of God before what He has revealed to us about himself. But the proof is all around us. The proof of Jesus Christ is in His Word. The proof of Jesus Christ, is here, in His house where he provides for us the forgiveness of sins. And the proof is all around us in our lives, in everything he so freely gives to us without even asking. As we look forward to Christmas Day, the Day that we celebrate Christ taking on human flesh and beginning His journey to the cross, let us never doubt or think that He is not who He says He is. For God has given us proof of His love for us, in the gift of His Son, who came into the world, to save us all.

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.