

SERVICE INFORMATION: DECEMBER 11, 2022
THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT
SUNDAY SERVICE & SERMON
Pastor Tom Olson; Minnesota Valley Free Lutheran Church

PRAISE AND WORSHIP: Luke Johnson and Praise Team
HYMNS AND LITURGY: Rebekah Olson
READER: Ruth Antal
THEME: Making sense out of pain and disappointment.

PRELUDE: Rebekah Olson

CALL TO WORSHIP: Psalm 85:10-13

*10 Love and faithfulness meet together;
righteousness and peace kiss each other.
11 Faithfulness springs forth from the earth,
and righteousness looks down from heaven.
12 The LORD will indeed give what is good,
and our land will yield its harvest.
13 Righteousness goes before him
and prepares the way for his steps.*

HYMN #37 (vss 1,2,5,6) "Once in Royal David's City"

CONFESSION OF SIN: *Almighty God, our Maker and Redeemer, we poor sinners confess to You that we are by nature sinful and unclean, and that we have sinned against You in thought, word, and deed. Therefore we flee for refuge to Your infinite mercy and ask You for Christ's sake, grant us forgiveness of all our sins, and by Your Holy Spirit increase in us true knowledge of You and of Your will and true obedience to Your Word, to the end that by Your grace we may come to eternal life, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.*

PRAYER

CHILDREN COME FOR THE ADVENT CANDLE READING

READER:

OLD TESTAMENT LESSON: *Isaiah 40:1-8 Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. 2 Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins. 3 A voice of one calling: "In the desert prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God. 4 Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. 5 And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it. For the mouth of the LORD has spoken." 6 A voice says, "Cry out." And I said, "What shall I cry?" "All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field. 7 The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the LORD blows on them. Surely the people are grass. 8 The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever."*

EPISTLE LESSON: *1 Corinthians 4:1-5 So then, men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God. 2 Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful. 3 I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. 4 My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me. 5 Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God.*

READER: Here ends the reading of God's Word.

CONGREGATION SINGS: God be praised, for His glad Tidings!

CONFESSION OF FAITH: I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and earth; And in Jesus Christ, His only son, our Lord; Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit; born of the virgin Mary; Suffered under Pontius Pilate; Was crucified, dead and buried; He descended into hell; The third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven; And is seated on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; From where He shall come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit; The holy Christian Church; the Communion of Saints; the Forgiveness of sins; The Resurrection of the body, And the Life everlasting. Amen

GLORIA PATRI: *Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost; As it was in the beginning, is not, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen, Amen.*

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND PRAYER FOR OFFERING

PRAISE SONGS: songs chosen by Luke...sung by "Praise team...Luke, Krista, Jacob, Hannah, etc.)

**SERMON TITLE: "TRYING TO MAKE SENSE OUT OF LIFE"
Matthew 11:2-11; Pastor Tom Olson; December 11, 2022**

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

FRIEND: I got a difficult phone call this week. A friend of mine called and told me he has advanced lung disease and is dying. I wept. From a sense of fairness, it doesn't make sense. He is one of the most honest and helpful people I have ever met. He is totally transparent and real...maybe too real at times. He did my ministry as a volunteer for me when I had cancer radiation so I could still get paid. Yet this very good, helpful and honest man has had a lifetime of serious troubles. On the other hand, God has given him a very loving wife, three precious children and his new delight, a beautiful baby granddaughter. I know he tries to figure it all out and there is a lot that just doesn't make sense. I am trying to make sense of it myself. It is not easy to lose a good friend. They are hard to find.

OURSELVES: I am sure that there are many things in your own life and family you also can't make sense of as well. We join the thinkers of the ages when we try to figure it out and come up disillusioned. John the Baptist found himself in a similar situation. He was the greatest prophet of all times and he ushered in the ministry of God's Messiah, Jesus Christ. Yet he found himself in prison, on death row and disillusioned. Jesus is going about doing amazing miracles, yet his second cousin and prophet, John, languishes in a horrible cell, waiting to have his head cut off by an insane King Herod. We throw our hands up with John and cry out to the Lord and say, "*Are you really the Messiah or should we wait for someone else to help us?*" Let's look at Matthew 11:2-11 under the theme, "TRYING TO MAKE SENSE OUT OF LIFE."

I. HONEST QUESTIONS: LIFE CAN BE VERY DISCOURAGING

Matthew 11:2 When John heard in prison what Christ was doing, he sent his disciples 3 to ask him, "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?"

JONI: Our current faith is not always as strong as it was in the past. When life starts to go in the wrong direction, we easily can blame God and doubt the very one we once had strong trust in. If you get a chance to see the old version of the movie, "Joni" from the 1980's, it is worth seeing again. When she gets paralyzed as a Christian teen, she first has this idea that God is going to heal her miraculously. But after every "unsuccessful" encounter with "faith healers" and miracle workers, she gets disillusioned because it is obvious that God is not going to heal her. The rest of her life, she will be a quadriplegic in a wheel chair. Then she comes face to face with her situation and her own self. At that point the call to live by FAITH ALONE becomes a reality.

EXAMPLES: When Sharon's dad was in his 90's with failing health, he began to doubt his faith. He asked me why he was getting so weak and not being healed. I looked right at him and said, "I will tell you why you are getting weak and sickly...you are getting old and that is what happens when you get old." Another man recently asked me if God was punishing him because he was weak and failing. I told him what I told my father-in-law. I said, "You are in your 90's, you are old, that is what happens when you get old. God is not punishing you...but He is letting you get old." Old age is a reward that not everyone gets, but it comes with physical and mental decline. We wear out and God allows it. Life can be hard and it is easy to doubt the goodness of God in those times.

The Bible says that we are like the grass, flourishing one day and quickly withering away when summer is over.

Isaiah 40:6-8 A voice says, "Cry out." And I said, "What shall I cry?" "All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field. 7 The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the LORD blows on them. Surely the people are grass. 8 The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever."

MARK: On Wednesday I drove to Mercy Hospital in Fridley to see Mark Gangl. He and I noted we both were 62 years old. Mark was dying. But unlike so many, he was not asking why. He was ready and waiting to be with the Lord in heaven. He was anxious to get healed from the PTSD emotional disorder that made his life so difficult. He had a solid trust in the grace of God and the forgiveness of our Savior. Life has been hard for Mark and he has had a lot of questions. But as the Savior as come in close view, his questions have dropped away and he is at peace.

Hebrews 11 is the best chapter in the Bible for this mystery. Some of those listed in the chapter of faith experienced miracles by faith, others endured great hardship by faith. God doesn't say why it is that way. So we need to accept the mystery. **WE ALL WRESTLE WITH LIFE'S DIFFICULT QUESTIONS LIKE JOHN THE BAPTIST DID.**

II. PROPHETIC ANSWERS: JESUS WANTS JOHN TO TRUST THE WORD OF GOD

Matthew 11:4-6 Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: 5 The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. 6 Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me."

PROPHECIES: What was Jesus doing? He was repeating the prophecies about the Messiah...the blind see, the lame walk, lepers are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor get good news. John knew the prophecies well. He heard the reports about the ministry of Jesus. He just needed to be reminded that *"things*

were not falling apart but they were falling in place.” He needed to quit focusing on His problems and instead find comfort in the Word of God.

ISRAEL: About 600 years before Christ, Israel was destroyed by the Babylonians. When they were hauled away to Babylon in captivity, they could be encouraged. They had the word of God that after 70 years of captivity they would be allowed to return to the promised land and rebuild. As they were taken away naked and empty handed it must have been hard to trust the Lord. But **THEY HAD THE WORD OF GOD** which never failed them. Seventy years later, the children were now old. They were released from captivity and returned to their childhood homeland. God’s Word did not fail them. We must not trust our emotions or even our intellect. We must **TRUST THE UNFAILING WORD OF GOD.**

QUESTION: What are you trusting in? When you read the newspaper are you upset about the headlines or excited about the fulfillment of prophecy in the headlines? Are you trying to stand on the quick sand of your emotions or are you standing on the rock of God’s Word? If you stand on the Word you are on solid ground. **JESUS GAVE JOHN PROPHETIC ANSWERS FROM THE WORD OF GOD.**

III. GOD’S PERSPECTIVE: JESUS HELPS THEM SEE THE BIG PICTURE

Matthew 11:7-11 As John's disciples were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: "What did you go out into the desert to see? A reed swayed by the wind? 8 If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in kings' palaces. 9 Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. 10 This is the one about whom it is written: "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.' 11 I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

REFLECTION: At this point Jesus addresses the crowd. He talks about John the Baptist who is now in prison and filled with doubt. Jesus tells them that John was the greatest man ever to be born and the greatest prophet ever to preach to Israel. He situation on death row in prison does not negate this, in fact, it affirms it. He is one of those spoken of in *Hebrews 11:36-38* **“Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. 37 They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated- 38 THE WORLD WAS NOT WORTHY OF THEM.”**

I Corinthians 4:5 Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God.

MARY: How do you think Mary, the mother of Jesus, felt on that silent, holy night? The “mother of the Messiah...in poverty, far from home, giving birth in a barn...” God’s ways are not our ways. The poet writes: **“Judge not the Lord by feeble sense...God is His own interpreter.”**

CHOICE: What then is our conclusion? We have two choices: **DESPAIR OR TRUST**...there is nothing else. Why would a child jump out of a second story of a building if he was asked to? It would be if the building was on fire and the one asking was his **FATHER** on the ground, ready to catch him. Despair or trust. I choose trust. In a short while we will be in heaven laughing and weeping with joy as we finally get to see things from God’s perspective and realize that our greatest disappointments were our greatest gifts. Life is much better if we can **WALK BY FAITH AND NOT BY SIGHT**...even if it is a hard path...like my dying friends, like John the Baptist.

Hebrews 12:2 “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus...who for the joy set before Him endured the cross...”

CONCLUSION: The one thing that we can say for sure is that we end up in heaven filled with the joy of the Lord. That helps me make sense out of life. In a short time, John’s body would be dead but his souls would be more alive than ever. In a matter of moments after his execution everything would make sense and all would be well. Jesus knew that. **THAT IS WHY JESUS DIDN’T RESCUE JOHN FROM PRISON.** That is why Jesus doesn’t always rescue us from our problems. It is because he wants something better for us that can only come through the disappointments of life. When we get to heaven, it will all make sense. Amen

May the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus. Amen

HYMN #36 “Infant Holy, Infant Lowly”

LORD’S PRAYER: *Our Father, Who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those that trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, The power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen*

DOXOLOGY with Three-fold Amen

POSTLUDE: Rebekah Olson