**The Beatitude of Not Being Offended**

Based on [Matthew 11:2-11](https://biblia.com/books/esv/Mt11.2-11)

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Third Sunday in Advent - *Gaudete*

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**And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.**

Those who love justice and righteousness in this life, can stumble in their faith, when Jesus calls them to suffer. So John in prison sent his disciples to ask Jesus, “**Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?**” Jesus Christ has come to heal our sickness of sin, and that happens in the preaching of Him crucified. He has come to reconcile us to God. He came to give us His Spirit to make us saints and holy people. But perfect Justice is something reserved for the world to come.

John the Baptist and/or his disciples apparently begin to doubt that Jesus is the messiah. We read, “**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?’ And Jesus answered them, ‘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 good news preached to them. And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.’”**

John had preached that Jesus would come in Judgment, with a winnowing fork in his hand to clear the hypocrites out of God’s kingdom like so much chaff. He was to preach and “prepare the way” for the messiah, though he wasn’t worthy even to untie his sandals. He was reluctant to baptize Jesus saying, “**I need to be baptized by you and you come to me.**” He saw Jesus and said, “**Behold, the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.**”

This John was now in prison, hypocrites are still being hypocrites with impunity, and John’s preaching appears to reach an anti-climax. If Jesus is the messiah, where’s his winnowing fork? If Jesus is the messiah, where is the judgment and the victory for his people? Could it be that Jesus is not really the Christ after all?

There has been some disagreement about who is doubting Jesus here. The text seems to say that John is asking Jesus the question from prison, and his disciples are just the messengers. But, many of the Early Church Fathers, including Martin Luther, believed that John never doubted who Jesus was, **he was only sending his disciples to ask this question so they could hear it from Jesus themselves**. John had already given testimony about Jesus. Therefore, they reason, it can’t be that he doesn’t know he’s the messiah, or that he was now doubting.

It is wrong to think that John the Baptist couldn’t be doubting whether Jesus is the Christ. First, Jesus never explicitly says he is the Christ to John, at least as recorded in the bible, and largely in his ministry, Jesus doesn’t go around saying he’s the messiah. Instead he preaches, and heals, and teaches with authority, and by his deeds faith is aroused to freely confess as Peter does, “You are the Christ.” So intellectually, John might be thinking “did I assume more of Jesus than he claimed to be?”

Also, spiritually, there is nothing wrong with thinking that John the Baptist could simply be having doubts about Jesus. Doubts are never good, and contrary to much blasphemy that passes as theology today, we don’t embrace doubt as a virtue. Doubt is often an excuse for rebellion. But doubt happens in a way that doesn’t signal rebellion, but is merely a confession of weakness. A father, whose boy had a demon, comes to Jesus and asks for healing. When Jesus says, “All things are possible for one who believes” the man says “I believe, help my unbelief.” I believe, help my unbelief”, this is proof positive that those who believe in Jesus can doubt and yet have the faith to pray for faith.

Regardless, be it John or his disciples, somebody is doubting, or God forbid, testing Jesus, the teaching of this gospel is first in these words: “**Blessed is the one who is not offended by me.”** “who does not fall away because of me.”

Jesus Christ comes first to heal and to save, not to judge, and punish, and condemn and this can be an offense, a scandal, literally a cause to “fall away.” Our enemies sin, death and the devil still seem to prevail in this life, despite the messiah having come. And the contrast between what we are promised and what we see in this life is so stark, that it taxes the faith our frail natures to endure it. Many who have faith, yet are struck with a horrible disease ask “why me.” It doesn’t compute that a great and mighty God, who is pleased with me because of the righteousness of Christ, would make his people suffer in such a way.

Henry David Thoreau’s brother nicked his finger while shaving, got tetnus, developed lockjaw and died within a month. All because of a little cut on the finger. So too John the Baptist, Jesus’ biggest supporter was carted off to prison about to die because of a hasty vow, and Jesus who is the one who is supposed to “liberate the captives” does nothing about it.

In the season of Advent, we realize the contrast between the first and second coming of the messiah. Gaudete, is the Latin word for this Sunday meaning Rejoice. “Come not in terrors as the king of kings, but kind and good with healing in thy wings.”

Jesus came in blessing, and he says don’t be offended by me. He then teaches the crowds about John himself, how John didn’t look like a successful man in soft clothing, but he was a suffering man as is fitting for a true prophet of God in a world of sin and unrighteousness.

But Jesus says, “**Among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is lease in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.”** John was still preaching under the old covenant, a preacher of Israel. We who know that Jesus Christ died on the cross for our sins are greater than he is, not in that John is condemned, but the means of his salvation were not fully manifested in his day.

But we who have been born from above through water and Spirit, know the messiah’s deeds. We know that Jesus Christ came to die on the cross for our sins, and was raised for our justification, and by having this knowledge, we have the kingdom of heaven.