

What You Hear and See
Matthew 11:2-19

Few would have guessed it. He was a most unlikely candidate. Nonetheless, he was a key figure in history. His birth did cause a bit of a stir. St. Luke records: *Everyone who heard this wondered about it, asking, "What then is this child going to be?"* (1:66) *Not a reed shaken by the wind. Not a man dressed in soft clothing. His clothes were made of camels' hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey* (Matthew 3:4). He was a prophet *preaching in the Desert of Judea and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."* (Matthew 3:1-2). *"I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire."* (Matthew 4:11-12).

John firmly believed this message. He was completely certain that God was set to keep His promise of sending the Messiah. He just wasn't sure that Jesus of Nazareth was the one.

Few would have guessed it. He was a most unlikely candidate. His family was not royalty in a palace. They did not dress him in soft clothes. His parents were peasants. When He was born His mother wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger... (Luke 2:7)

He did make great claims. In His first sermon in His home town, Jesus read from Isaiah 61 and then told His family and friends it was written about Him. He was the One. *The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor and the day of vengeance of our God* (Vv. 1-2) *"Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."* (Luke 4:21).

John wasn't so sure. It's not really what he heard. It didn't match up with what he saw. *The vengeance of our God?* Now John could preach the *vengeance of our God*. *"You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?"* (Luke 3:7).

With Jesus, it was a different story. What had John heard? A woman had been caught in adultery. The crowd had rocks in their hands ready to stone her as the Law of Moses commanded. Jesus intervened, and they dropped their rocks and walked away. Jesus said to the woman, *"Has no one condemned you?"* *"No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."* (John 8:10-11). No vengeance there. It sounded more like forgiveness.

And what did John see? *[F]reedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners?* Not at all! He was sitting in prison, and Jesus was doing nothing about it. John had said and done what God had wanted him to do. It would have been reasonable for John to ask, "If Jesus is the Savior,

why isn't He saving me?" John's faith in God keeping His promises was strong, but what He heard and saw had him asking questions. Could the same be said about each of us?

God has called us to be His very own in the water and word of holy baptism. We have received the sign of the cross on our foreheads and hearts marking us as ones redeemed by Christ the crucified. We have been given faith, the forgiveness of sins and the promise of life everlasting without Lord. But what do we see and hear?

Our prayer list this morning includes those who have asked that we pray for them as they carry burdens of body and soul. Are they the only ones? ... No.

You are seated in every other pew, or watching from home, because of COVID-19. Many have suffered its symptoms. Some have died. Many more have not been infected but fear they might.

What other burdens do we bear? What else do we see and hear? Financial strain. Relationships on the rocks. The weight of our own sin as we compare what God wants us to say and do compared to how we actually live. We can lament with St. Paul: "I know what is good and want to do it, but instead I do the evil I don't want to do. What a wretched man I am."

We firmly believe that God is our loving Father and that He has sent His Son, Jesus, to live, die, and rise from the dead to save us. But at the same time we wonder about how His plan is being carried out in our lives. What we see and hear

does not always line up with the way we think things should go.

In these moments of doubt, we cling to Christ. We attend Sunday school and worship to be reminded of His promises. We begin the service as we were baptized – in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. We close the service with words of promise that the Lord will bless us and keep us and make face shine on us and be gracious unto us. In between we hear the words of absolution delivering to us the forgiveness of sins Jesus earned for us on His cross. We see the bread and wine in which Jesus comes to us with His very body and blood for the forgiveness of our sins and the strengthening of our faith.

We earnestly desire to hear and see these things that remind us our sins are forgiven and that one day all the trials we face will come to an end, and that we will spend eternity in peace and joy with our Lord.

Our confidence is always in Christ. This confidence is due in part to another unlikely candidate. He was another peasant. He became a monk, a priest and a college professor. He searched the Scriptures and preached and taught the truth he found there: We are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, and that the Bible alone is the true source of teaching about God and our relationship with Him.

We rejoice that we have come to believe this message. We have every confidence that by God's grace the faith He has given us in His Son, Jesus, will save us. We know this is His good and gracious will. It is our source of hope no matter what we see and hear. Amen.