

## Sermon Transcript for the Third Sunday of Advent, December 13, 2020

Grace mercy and peace be to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Now this is the Gaudete week, which comes, of course, from our Introit, which begins with "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I will say rejoice." And Gaudete means rejoice. And so this is the day where we focus on the rejoicing. And what do we rejoice? We have the image of John the Baptist looking none too happy in prison. And the reason he is in prison is because Herod did not like him declaring that it was wrong for him to marry his brother's wife. Now that seems to go contrary to with what we have been speaking of in here, that it says in Corinthians, it says, "Do not judge. Let the Lord judge." And yet we have here, John the Baptist, and Jesus praising John the Baptist being the greatest of all men born of women. And yet, he is in prison because he seems to have judged Herod the King.

Now, that means we have to understand what it means to judge and not judge. And there's a difference between judging someone and declaring what they are doing as sinful. There is a big difference. Judging someone is condemning them to hell, basically damning them and saying, "You are going to hell for what you are doing." That is judgment. I do not know what is in the heart of any one individual or another. And I cannot determine that. Only the Lord knows. And, even though John was a strong individual, there are many others that are weak, and who may demonstrate to the world not much of their Christian faith. And yet, they may be a bruised reed or smoldering wick, and God will not snuff them out or break them. He will save them. So I cannot say who will be in the kingdom of heaven or who will not be. All I can do, and all that I am called to do, is to declare the Word of God. And sometimes that Word of God says this behavior is sin. And that is, indeed, what I am called to do, and what we all are called to do. It's not judging someone to say the behavior that you are doing is sinful, according to the Bible. That's not judgment, that is flat out stating the facts of what the Bible says. We are not judging people when we declare the Word of God to be true, and declare that what they are doing is not in conformity to the Word of God. That is just declaring God's Word to this individual. Judging them is saying, "You're going to hell." I cannot do that, nor can you. But we can stand firm and say that this behavior and that behavior is sinful. And we are called to stand for the truth, to stand firm on the foundation of God, because it is a cause for rejoicing that God has come. It is a cause for rejoicing that our sins are forgiven. People do not know that they need their sins forgiven, if they are not told that what they are doing is sinful. And so, we are called to comfort God's people, comfort the people of God, not to judge them. Comfort them with the fact that their Savior has come. Comfort them with the fact that knowing their sin, and knowing our sin, God still came to send His Son to receive us, to die for us, so that He might receive us into His kingdom.

Now, John the Baptist is declared as this great man, a prophet greater than anyone else who was before him. And yet, he even says that the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than John the Baptist. How can that be so? You see, John the Baptist never got to see the fulfillment of all that he prophesied. He prophesied that Jesus would indeed be the Messiah. And here we have him sending his disciples to confirm that fact. Now whether John was in doubt, "Did I make a mistake? Are you really the one, Jesus? Or should we look for somebody else?" Whether that was the case or whether he wanted his disciples to hear from the horse's mouth, as we would say, what it is that Jesus is doing and who He really is. Either way, he sends his disciples to Jesus and asked them, "Are you the one? Or should we look for another?" Even if it is doubt, John the Baptist is still fulfilling his role of pointing us to the Messiah. He is the one that cries out in the wilderness, "Prepare the way for the Lord." And even here, he is preparing the way for the Lord, because Jesus gets to respond to his question by quoting, again, the Old Testament and saying, "Look, this is what was promised, when the Messiah was to come. That the lame would walk, that the blind would receive their sight, that the lepers would be cleansed and the deaf hear. Even the dead being raised up to new life. But most importantly, the most important thing is that the poor would have Good News preached to them." And that is, indeed, what Jesus Christ has done. He preaches Good News. Because, even the lame who walk and the deaf who hear and

the lepers who were cleansed, they still face the ultimate judgment, which is death. All of us do, because all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. That's not judging. That's just declaring facts. All have sinned and fall short, and are justified freely by the grace of God. That's the comfort that is offered. And that is why we can say that the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he, because the least knows, we already know, the outcome. We know that Jesus Christ came, not just to be born, but to die and to raise Himself from the dead, to be raised from the dead by the Father and sitting at the right hand of God. See, it's not just a promise that the dead are raised, but that all dead will be raised to new life, those who believe in the promise to everlasting life, and those who do not, to everlasting damnation. So, we comfort people by knowing you believe in Jesus Christ, you know what He has done for you, and you know the outcome of your life. Even though you die, yet shall you live.

We are called to live and be stewards of God's mysteries. Be stewards of the mystery that even though we have fallen short of the glory of God, even though, if we look at ourselves, we could not possibly imagine comparing ourselves to John the Baptist. We are, indeed, great in the kingdom of God because we have faith in the fulfilled promise of Jesus Christ. Because we know that Christ, that God himself, came and died for us. And what a blessed, blessed information that is to all people. And so again, we continue this theme during Advent, of preparing ourselves and being ready for the time of light.

We know that God is with us, that He has revealed Himself to us, and that we do not need to be afraid. Again, we have, the things will be brought to light that were hidden in darkness. We have that theme of light and dark that is coming through again in this reading, in the 1 Corinthians reading. And we know that God is bringing all things to light, and we do not have to be afraid of that because He has wiped all the sins from our lives, and wiped every tear from our eyes, and we will be with Him for all eternity. What a blessed, blessed theme for Advent that is, to look forward to the coming of Jesus Christ.

May His grace, mercy, and peace be and abide with you always, now and forevermore, unto life everlasting. Amen.