

Third Sunday in Advent
December 16, 2018

Text: Luke 7:18-28

Theme: “Enlighten Me”

Enlighten me, shine the light so I can see what I’m doing. This could be an actual light shining as in having enough light in this room to read. It could be instruction to do something you are having trouble doing, like changing the ink cartridge on your printer. That’s why we have YouTube, for enlightenment. In a recent edition of the comic strip “Zits,” Jeremy, the eternal teenage, was sitting in a dark room watching such instructive videos after being asked by his parents to change the light bulb.

Enlightenment is not always welcome. Such is the case when someone wants to enlighten us as to why we need to by a product we do not need nor even desire. It can also be the case when we are being asked to take a good hard look at something in our lives that we would rather not.

Our collect for this day is a prayer for enlightening. *Lord Jesus Christ, we implore You to bear our prayers and to lighten the darkness of our hearts by Your gracious visitation; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen* Such enlightenment is necessary. Without it we are in the dark, a darkness deeper than that inside a cave. God brings light. God is light. The God who said let light shine out of darkness has shone in our heart with the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. In Christ we have the light to see our darkness and the light to see the True Light who has come into the world. Gaudete—rejoice. It is the day to do that (Gaudete Sunday).

We are enlightened to see God's gifts and God's guiding and equipping, a guiding and equipping that expands the kingdom of the One who has come in His gracious visitation.

There was a lot to be seen and heard from Jesus. His deeds and His teachings were not in secret. John looked for the dawning of the Messianic age. He was shedding more light on the OT shadow of the Christ to come. This shadow was given shape by the prophets. Israel had gone into exile and a remnant had returned as spoken by the prophets. God's people were waiting for the dawning of the light (Isaiah 9:2), waiting for Immanuel (Isaiah 7:14), the Lord our righteousness (Jeremiah 23:6), a mighty One to save (Zephaniah 3:17). They were looking for the Lord to come with His reward and recompense.

Yes, the shadow was shaped by the prophets. But then no more prophets, around 400 years of silence since the words of Malachi. Now that silence is broken by John, that voice crying in the wilderness. "Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand." (Matthew 3:2) That voice calls to produce fruit in keeping with repentance. The Mightier One comes. It will be a time of threshing and gathering and burning, the wheat gathered into the barns and the chaff burned in unquenchable fire. Was the time at hand of the heavens being rolled up like a scroll and the eternal banquet on God's holy mountain to begin? Were those days of judgement to usher it all in about to begin?

John proclaimed boldly a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. John called all to repentance until the One arrived to whom John had said he had need of baptism by His hand. But it happened as planned, Jesus is baptized by John. John was there to hear the voice from heaven and to see the Holy Spirit descend upon Jesus as a dove. John would hear of the lamp of Jesus' teaching and the torch of His deeds.

Time goes on. John is arrested and put into prison by Herod. The work of Jesus goes on, but is this the One? John sends a disciple delegation of two to ask Jesus. These had heard from John that Jesus must increase and John decrease. Certainly Herod had seen to John's decrease. Jesus as on the increase as crowds continued to gather around Him. But where was the judgment on the unrighteous, the unrighteous like Herod? They may well have had questions. And John, did he have doubts at this time also? Was this indeed the coming One? Maybe they were just not seeing it.

Are we seeing it? Are we seeing fruit of God's Kingdom, fruit to rejoice in on this Gaudete Sunday? What do we see and hear? Does it appear we live in a time of encroaching darkness. What is now accepted conduct, even conduct to be desired, was previously frowned on and even condemned. Has the church been viewing it through transition lenses—changes little by little and is little noticed?

We can shine the light of consideration on a more local and personal level. We look around here this morning and we are not exactly overflowing with folks. There are some we have not seen in some time. And when we look at our school, Concordia Christian Academy, well, space is not a problem. We have three empty classroom (3 out of 5). When it comes to hungering and thirsting for righteousness, does that appear to be minimal? Is there more hungering and thirsting after what this present life has to offer, such hungering and thirsting even peaked by the season?

But what about me, what about you? It is easy to get caught up in the me part. Others can be a bother if they don't fit into my world the way I prefer. And then we take a look at ourselves in the light of God's law and we see we have been guilty of what is not right, and what is not good, and what is not intended, fallen to sin again. This doesn't make for much joy or rejoicing. Gaudete, how can that be? Enlighten me!

Do we know what we are looking for? Are we looking through the lens of my wants and my limited understanding? It is time for another look from an enlightening angle. Here I have two examples. You can take out that mystery sheet in your worship order. Look at the side with the number 10 on the bottom. What do you see? Who sees a young lady with a bonnet? Who sees a more seasoned lady with a wart on her nose? Now look at the flip side. Who sees a rather cool cat blowing a sax? Who sees a face? Well both are there on each side. Maybe it takes a different angle, an enlightened one. You can see both the older lady and younger, the sax player and the face. We actually have an added bonus on the sax side. If you hold it up to the light the silhouette on the other side helps form the face of this side, a fortuitous alignment.

John's disciples do make it to Jesus. We read, "at that hour He healed many people of diseases and plagues and evil spirits, and on many who were blind He bestowed sight." (vs 21) The delegation had asked, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we *expect* another?" Jesus answered, "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard, the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up." (vs 22) Earlier in the chapter (vs 14, 15) we saw Jesus raising the son of the widow of Nain from the dead. Jesus' words would remind those disciples and John of the prophecies of the Messianic age (like Isaiah 35). The Coming One would bring both judgment, which John had emphasized, and would come with healing in His wings (Malachi 4:2). It would be a time of cleansing and renewal upon those redeemed and their abode. Jesus was giving them an enlightened look.

We have the lens before us of the Scriptures. There we can see we are not God which tells us we don't see it all and we don't know it all. Jesus and His apostles tell us not to expect it all to be easy. There is talk of enduring and bearing crosses for the sake of

Christ. His Word never keeps us in the dark about the power of sin within us and battle we face. It tells us of times of sorrow and times of joy. We do rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who mourn.

Jesus enlightens the crowd concerning John. He praises John. He makes clear that John was not a reed shaken by the. He was not driven by the breeze of the desire of those hearing. He preached God's call to repentance with power and conviction. His was not the soft life of those wearing fine clothes in a palace. His was the garb of one living and doing his work in the wilderness. He was a prophet, and not just any prophet. He was the prophet spoken by the last prophet heard from, the who had spoken, "Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you." (v 27, Malachi 3:1) Jesus says of those born of women there is none great than John, and yet who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he (v. 28). The least one born of water and of spirit, a child of God is greater than the greatest of this present world.

Jesus is the Coming One. He is the Messenger of the Covenant. Judgement was about to be meted out. He will say, "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished." (Luke 12:50) There was a cup before Him to drink, a cup that it would not be possible to remove. It was the cup and baptism of God's judgement against sin.

He will drink it. It looked like defeat, yet it was victory over the devil. It looked like a man dying a humiliating death. It was, but it was more. It was the Holy One suffering in place of the unholy. He faces His own judgement for us so we won't have to. Those who don't believe Him will have to face it on their own, face it forever. His victory in the struggle against sin, death, and the devil is proclaimed by His resurrection.

This joyful Eastertide
Away with sin and sorrow!
My love, the Crucified,
Has sprung to life this morrow: (LSB, 482, stanza 1)

Yes, now I see. The wait is over. Jesus answer is, I Am, and even I AM. Watch, listen, and believe. Blessed is the one who is not offended by me. (vs 23) There is fruit. The Kingdom of God advances. Our being here is evidence of that. We are part of the fruit. We are here to hear and be enlightened.

Blessèd Jesus, at Your Word
We are gathered all to hear You.
Let our hearts and souls be stirred
Now to seek and love and fear You,
By Your teachings, sweet and holy,
Drawn from earth to love You solely. (LSB 902, stanza)

There is more fruit to be produced. There is the fruit of the deeds and words of our lives. There is the fruit of those yet to be reborn. All this doesn't mean we simply resolve ourselves to the darkness around us and still within us. No, but we recognize God is in control, and we use the means He has given us to overcome the darkness, especially the message that the darkness has been overcome. We trust He is working in ways we cannot always see. We have reason to rejoice. The darkness of our hearts is enlightened by His gracious visitation.

“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ, Jesus.” (Philippians 4:7) Gaudete!