

Sermon 12-16-18
Pastor Ray Lorthioir
Trinity Lutheran Church
W. Hempstead, NY

Based on the Gospel for the Second Sunday in Advent, Luke 7:18-35

Are You The One?

Are you the one? That's a question we continually ask. Are you the one to solve my phone problem? Are you the one to paint my house? Are you the one I am to marry? Are you one I can put my trust in? Are you the one to lead the team to victory? Are you the doctor who can tell me what's wrong? Are you the one to run the country?

When there's a problem or a situation beyond our capabilities we naturally search for someone who has the skill and the will to create a viable solution. The more insoluble the problem, the greater the searching. But, the more insoluble the problem, the harder it is to find that person. And the greater the number of people affected by a situation, the greater and more universal the yearning for a problem solver becomes.

In history, there have been times of tumult and trouble when great masses of people have yearned for a savior, someone with knowledge of what to do, how to solve the universal problems. In such times someone always puts themselves forward as the one. The trouble with earthly saviors, however, is that they normally can't deliver on their promises. As long as the present world, ruined by sin, continues to exist, no mortal will be able to lead you into any kind of Promised Land. As we're advised in Psalm 146:3-4, "3 Do not put your trust in princes, in mortal men, who cannot save. 4 When their spirit departs, they return to the ground; on that very day their plans come to nothing." Also, as we've seen from history and what's going on in the world today, those who promise utopia often lead nations to economic ruin, enslavement, war and terror by government.

Now, when the end of this world comes Scripture prophesies that there will be a final representative of the spirit of anti-Christ. When he comes, he will no doubt come as world savior. Scripture seems to indicate that he will even have supernatural capabilities. But the great deceiver's purpose will be what it has always been – to lead every heart into final rebellion against their Creator Daddy God and thus into the eternal ruin of hell.

As we saw last week, when John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, many wondered if he was the promised Messiah. He said, however, that he was only the one preparing the way. He taught this about the Messiah: Luke 3:16-17, "He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

According to John, Messiah's work is to set people on fire for God, then make a final separation. All those on fire for God and desiring to live with Him forever will

be able to do so in a new world. On the other hand, all those who are cold, indifferent, rebellious, and antagonistic toward God and His Messiah will also be set on fire, but in a different way. They will certainly get their heart's burning desire – to live apart from God, His love and His righteousness forever. That's what hell is all about.

When John the Baptist's cousin, Jesus, suddenly appeared on the scene, there was again a great stirring. Could this one be the Messiah? But as Jesus' ministry went on in that first year, contrary to what many expected, immediate political deliverance and a basic change in the world did not appear. It seems that even John was disappointed by this. Of course, John was in a desperate and depressing situation, imprisoned by Herod Antipas for criticizing Herod's adulterous marriage to his brother's wife, Herodias. Therefore, John sent two disciples over to Jesus. As we read in today's gospel, their message was a simple one: Luke 7:19, "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?"

This is a very Jewish question. For, the Jews were looking for Messiah. And, the only way it can be answered is by looking into the Jewish scriptures. No other writings will help you. But to this day, even many Jews will argue that Jesus of Nazareth is not the Messiah. This only goes to show that Jesus must forever remain controversial.

Nevertheless, every human being who has or will live on the planet must answer this question concerning Jesus: "Are you the one?" And according to John the Baptist, the answer they arrive at will determine their eternal destiny.

Now this is where some modern people come to a very interesting place. Because Jesus' ministry took place so long ago and because the world looks like it will continue on indefinitely, it's possible to say that the question doesn't have to be answered at all, because it's an invalid question. There really was no John and no Jesus. Or, at least if they existed, they didn't do and say the things recorded about them in the Bible. Being that this is the Christmas season, we'll be hearing various forms of this anti-Christian propaganda in the news media.

However, when it comes to ancient historical sources, no one is better attested to than Jesus of Nazareth – not Alexander the Great or Caesar or anyone else. Even skeptical scholars agree that Jesus of Nazareth lived and died on a Roman cross. Skeptical scholars agree that within a very short time of Jesus' death, people began reporting Him resurrected from the dead and it was from these reports that the Christian movement grew.

Are you the one? As we've said, this is a Jewish question. Therefore, Jesus answered John the Baptist in a Jewish way. We read in Luke 7:21-23, "At that very time Jesus cured many who had diseases, sicknesses and evil spirits, and gave sight to many who were blind. So he replied to the messengers, 'Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: 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. Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me.'"

The miracles Jesus was performing were either performed by the prophets of the Old Testament or prophesied by them. Elijah resuscitated a young boy from the dead in 1 Kings 17. His successor, Elisha did the same in 2 Kings 4. Elisha healed Naaman the Syrian of leprosy in 2 Kings 5. Twice Jesus fed thousands of people with

only a few loaves of bread and a few fishes. In 2 Kings 4 we read that Elisha fed 100 people with only 20 loaves of bread and there was bread left over. Jesus didn't even mention this one to John's disciples.

As for the blind receiving sight, the deaf hearing and the lame walking, none of the Old Testament prophets performed such miracles. However, the prophets spoke of a coming figure who would. Here's what Isaiah had to say in Isaiah 29:18-19, "In that day the deaf will hear the words of the scroll, and out of gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind will see. Once more the humble will rejoice in the LORD; the needy will rejoice in the Holy One of Israel." Notice that in verse 19, the preaching of good news to the poor – the humble and needy – is mentioned.

We read in Isaiah 32:3-4, "Then the eyes of those who see will no longer be closed, and the ears of those who hear will listen. The mind of the rash will know and understand, and the stammering tongue will be fluent and clear." Here the blindness and deafness are spiritual. But remember that Jesus even gave fluent speech to the physically mute. If He could open physical eyes, He would be the one to open spiritual eyes.

We read in Isaiah 35:5-6, "Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy." Here all four categories of miracles are mentioned.

In his hometown of Nazareth, Jesus stood up in the synagogue and spoke Isaiah 61:1, "The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach 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" Again, the preaching of good news to the humble is mentioned. We could go to many more places in the Old Testament for proofs of Jesus' ministry.

Do you see how this is a Jewish question? Without those writings Jesus would only have been known as a Jewish miracle worker. But because of the Torah and the Prophets, Jesus can be hailed as Messiah. He performed Messianic miracles. Now, Scripture doesn't tell us John's reaction when his messengers returned with Jesus' words, but apparently he was satisfied with their report and took heart.

Now, after John's disciples left, Jesus spoke to the crowd around Him, concerning John. He said in Luke 7:27, "This is the one about whom it is written: 'I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.'" Jesus was quoting from the Messianic prophecy of Malachi 3:1 that we saw in last week's first lesson. He proclaimed John the Baptist to be the messenger of the Lord, the fulfillment of that prophecy. And thereby He indirectly proclaimed Himself as the Messiah. Indeed, it says in the remainder of Malachi 3:1, "Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come," says the LORD Almighty." To anyone who was listening carefully Jesus practically shouted at them, "I am The One you've been looking for. I am the LORD. I am your Messiah."

However, it must have blown over most of their heads. The reason is that they either had to stone Jesus for speaking blasphemy, or they had to bow down to Him as their Lord if He spoke the truth. But, they did neither. What choice will we make?

Finally, Jesus said this in Luke 7:28, "I tell you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John; yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater

than he.” Now, only God knows who the great ones are in His Kingdom. Therefore, if we consider ourselves least in the Kingdom of God, nevertheless all of us here this morning are greater than John the Baptist. How can this be?

The important key is found in Jesus’ odd expression, “those born of women.” Let’s compare this, then, with the statement made in John 1:12-13, “Yet to all who received him [Jesus], to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God – children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.” Those born of women are born of natural descent, human decision or a husband’s will. All of us are born this way and this means we’re born in the original sin of Adam and Eve. We’re born to be rebels against our Creator God. John the Baptist was born of woman. But John was executed before Jesus was crucified and raised from the dead. Therefore, he could not know the power of being born of God in this life. He only knew the first birth – physical birth into this world.

Therefore, John the Baptist could only preach a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. He could preach that the one coming after Him would be the one to baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire – that is Jesus. But he never experienced what the Apostles experienced and what they preached as a result of Jesus’ crucifixion, resurrection and the pouring out of Lord Holy Spirit, the fire of God.

For this reason, those born of God – the second birth – have much greater privilege than those merely born of women. This is how the least in the Kingdom of God can be greater than John the Baptist.

As we saw last week, on the Day of Pentecost 33A.D., Peter preached this message in Acts 2:38, “... ‘Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’” We said that repentance is giving up all the words in your life that are not God’s Word and forsaking the power that is in those rebellious words. Repentance is then submitting your life to the power of God’s creative and living Word. Repentance is life changing.

In the same way baptism, into Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins is a life changing experience. It’s a deep and fundamental supernatural experience, a gift from almighty God. The life changing power proceeds from faith in God’s Word found in Romans 6:3-4, “3... all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death[.] 4 We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.” This death is a death to the old life, the tyranny of the sinful nature. It’s profound. It’s deep. It goes to the very core of a believer’s being. It’s real. It changes everything, because there is also a resurrection to a new life. The power in this new life is amazing because it’s Lord Holy Spirit’s fire fed by the fuel of God’s Word. I’ve experienced this and there are many others that have this testimony.

It doesn’t matter when you were baptized. Things change when you are drawn into the Word of God concerning your baptism and what God is doing to you through His Word and your baptism. Blessed are they who have the Word of repentance and baptism in them from a young age. But it doesn’t matter where we’ve been or what we’ve done. Lord Holy Spirit wants us to believe, know and experience that we are reborn children of God. This comes through repentance and

faith in the baptism into Christ Jesus. We'll die to what we were and be raised to what we will become in Him.

So, repent, be baptized and receive the Holy Spirit. The easiest way to know you have received Lord Holy Spirit is when you can believe unreservedly that Jesus is the one – the one for you. It's knowing that you don't have to look for another. Jesus is the one – the one and only in the whole universe. You know this because God's Word is true. Knowing the truth of God's Word in you is the work of the Holy Spirit. It's like being set on fire from within. And then finding yourself desiring what God desires as God's desire is made known to us in His Word. That's the burning fire of God.

Therefore, Jesus is the One who fulfilled the prophecy given to John the Baptist. Through Jesus, God's Holy Spirit was poured out on all flesh so that we might believe the Word and be baptized into Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins and the death of our old life. We receive Lord Holy Spirit in baptism so that by faith in the Word, we might live a whole new life. This work of God creates the most outrageous miracle this world has ever seen – children born of God. Amen.

All Bible quotes are from the NIV.