**Matthew 11:2-15**

Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples **3** and said to him, “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?” **4** And Jesus answered them, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: **5**  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. **6** And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.” **7** As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? **8** What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who wear soft clothing are in kings’ houses. **9** What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. **10** This is he of whom it is written, “ ‘Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you.’ **11** Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. **12**  From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force. **13**  For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John, **14** and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come. **15**  He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

**“Glad Sounds”**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. We try very hard as a society to make the holiday season joyful. There is absolutely nothing wrong with that fact. Yet, in such striving after joy. Joy may be the last thing people experience. This is why the, “most wonderful time of the year” can also turn out to be the most deadly. Relapse into all kinds of addictions actually increases during the holidays. There are plenty of reasons ranging from family conflict, financial concerns, emotional distress, and the list goes on. Now there are ways to keep out of those dark holes of addictions. Yet, even avoiding bad ways to cope with life does not mean joy ends up being the final outcome.

Some might consider Advent in the church to be a dismal season with all this anticipation and repentance over the coming of the Lord. However, this third Sunday in Advent actually makes a place for joy. You go through the service today hearing that word quite a bit. The pink or rose candle now lit on the Advent Wreath is that visible reminder. Here is a color lighter than blue, but certainly not as bright as the white candle lit on Christmas. So, Christian joy is a fruit of the Spirit, but not the foundation of life. That abides only by faith in God at the present for sometimes we have evidence of joy and other times not so much. Yet, in such absence this fact still remains. The coming of Christ is basis enough to rejoice.

1. **John had a basis better off than most for rejoicing**.
2. Now first we need to recognize that there are those in every age who had a good life.

* A few receive this by birth into a particular family or by belonging to a certain nation.
* Some obtain a good life from those successes achieved over the years.
* Others grasp at it by the particular sacrifices they had to make.
* Still others happen to stumble upon a good life by an opportunity that came out of nowhere.

1. John had a life far from what we call “good” today, but he had a solid basis to rejoice.

* He was the miracle baby promised by God to barren Elizabeth in her old age.
* His father, Zechariah, who after miraculously regaining his voice sang, “And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways” (Luke 1:76)
* Likewise, John had such success in His preaching and baptizing that some considered him the Messiah.
* Jesus even confirmed it all to the crowds summing up saying, “Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist.”

1. **Yet, John lost any basis to rejoice when put behind bars.**
2. A devastating blow came upon the last prophet of the old testament.

* Literally, it was for John one extreme to another!
* He was in prison not for doing wrong, but for doing what was right in God’s sight.
* Worse than despairing of his own prophetic calling, he sent his disciples to ask Jesus a frank question, “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?”
* Had John invested in the wrong messiah? How was Jesus living up to all that John had pointed Him out to be? The deeds of Jesus were doing well for everyone else, but what about John?

1. If the greatest of those born of women felt unfilled in prison, what about us when distresses lock us up and throw away the key?

* Naturally we want a miracle. Everyone wants a miracle in a world that has so little joy.
* Yet, more times than not, we are forced into a prison that has no need of bars to make us wonder if God cares.
* It only takes that special ornament, seeing that one person, hearing that song, or wrapping just another present to trigger doubt and disbelief.
* If only my addiction would just disappear. If only my loved one had not died. If only I was not so alone. If only I could have kept my job, if only my health, if only, if only, if only God!
* Sin, death and the Devil are constantly trying to drive Christ away from us and that goes double during the holidays.

1. **Jesus restored the basis for John to rejoice by His Word**.
2. No change in scenery for John, but he had something promising to hear that no prison could keep out.

* Jesus told him the blind see, lame walk, lepers were clean, the deaf hear, the dead live, and the poor hear the Gospel.
* The last on the list of miracles seems to have little glory, but it was the greatest in terms of what God gives.
* More than poverty, the “poor” were the powerless and lowly. It was John in prison having to rely only on the Gospel.
* Forgiveness of sins based on the preaching and life of Jesus gave faith, while the work of a miracle was not going to save John.

1. We like to celebrate courage and strength, but Christian joy shines brightest in our weakness.

* Jesus calls any blessed who regardless of addictions, loss, demonic attack, injustice and whatever else, “is not offended by me.”
* It is to get up every day not trying to change your condition, but first joyfully confessing what has changed saying, “I am baptized.”
* Success is the eternal victory Christ achieved so that a good life is His forgiveness daring to follow you all your days.
* There is no pretty bow or nice way to wrap up what befalls us, but Christ in joy by bread and wine lets the poor never be apart from Him.

So there is joy in Advent, but it is far from happiness. Being happy depends on the conditions of life that never stay the same. Christian joy looks to Jesus and John the baptizer prepares the way for what that means. He was the greatest born of women, but John did not live to see what Christ fulfilled by His cross. No wonder Jesus said, “Yet, the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.” Christian joy contains fullness greater than John the Baptizer. The poverty of Christ by His death has made the poor rich with forgiveness, life, and salvation. It is to believe that soon, “sorrow and sighing shall flee away.” The coming of Christ is basis enough to rejoice. Amen. Now the peace of Christ, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting. Amen.