

Luke 7:18-28

“You just wait till dad gets home!” When children hear these words, they may decide to run; run and hide. And for good reason. Whatever punishment they deserve, they know that dad will bring it on. But imagine their surprise if dad brings hugs rather than discipline; presents instead of punishment. It is for this reason that John the Baptist is surprised. In our text we see him sending two of his disciples to Jesus to ask Him, “*Are You the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?*”

John is a little confused. You heard his sermon to the crowds in last Sunday’s text: “*You brood of vipers!*” he cried, “*Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?*” “You just wait till dad gets home! And the Lord is coming, so you’d better repent.”

And the Lord does come. Jesus begins His ministry among the people. Yet it is not quite what John expects. Instead of running from Jesus, the crowds run to Him. And why is this? He has compassion on them. He restores sight to the blind. He makes the lame to walk. He cleanses the lepers. He raises the dead. And he preaches good news to the poor.

Where’s the wrath? Where’s the punishment? Dad’s home, but he’s all dressed up in a Santa suit handing out hugs and presents, and to sinners who don’t deserve it. Maybe he’s not the one. Maybe the one who brings all that wrath of God is still coming. Maybe that one is someone else and not Jesus. John is confused.

So Jesus sends his disciples back with a comforting message. John is a prophet; a great theologian. But even the greatest among us need to humbly learn from Jesus.

It’s not that John is incorrect. He preaches rightly. His sermon is not his, but the Holy Spirit’s. God’s people must wake up. They must repent. For God’s wrath is coming. And they deserve it. We deserve it. Yes...you and me. If we disagree, we’re calling God a liar. “*There is no one who does good, no not one!*” Holy Scripture screams these words out to us. “*If we say we have not sinned, we make (God) a liar,*” and “*the soul that sins shall die:*” separation from God. John preached it, and we must hear it. More, we must own it. We must take God’s words to heart and repent.

So yes, God’s wrath is coming. But here is where John has some confusion. For Jesus does not come to bring God’s wrath. He comes to bear it, to feel it, to endure it for all of us.

If Jesus was the bringer of wrath, would He be restoring sight to the blind and cleansing lepers? If Jesus was the one to bring punishment, would He be raising the dead and preaching the good news? For all of these things He is doing.

And for us today, if Jesus is the one who comes to punish sinners, why would He give us Holy Baptism, Holy Communion, and Holy Absolution? Why would He draw sinners like us; sinners who deserve punishment, into His holy house on this holy day to receive His holy gifts?

He is coming as judge, and He will slay the wicked. All this on the Last Day. But that's why He comes today with mercy. He comes to work repentance in us. He comes to give us faith. He comes to forgive our sins. Jesus comes today, not in wrath, but in peace so that we do not run and hide from Him on the Last Day, but rather lift up our eyes and hearts with joy.

You believe this, don't you? If you believed that Jesus was the bringer of God's wrath, you would not love Christmas but despise it. If the baby born of Mary had come to punish you for your sinfulness, you would not be celebrating at this time of the year.

But you do celebrate. And God wants you to. He wants you to rejoice. *Rejoice* is the theme for this Third Sunday in Advent. When God sent His angel to the shepherds on Christmas Eve, his words to them were not, "You'd better run and hide! Dad's home! The Lord is here! God's wrath has come and it's in a manger!" Just the opposite... "*Fear not*" were his words to them.

And these same words are for you. These words are connected to every holy gift of God for you. In Holy Baptism, as the water is sprinkled over you, hear God's words to you: Fear not. Fear not for now you are My beloved child. Here in your baptism I cover you with Christ and His holy innocence.

In Holy Communion you hear the words: Fear not. Jesus comes in bread and wine, not in anger, but in grace. He comes to assure you of His love for you, of your place with Him now and always.

In Holy Absolution God speaks the words, "Fear not" to you. Fear not, for I forgive you...all your sins I forgive. Jesus died and rose again for you. He endured the penalty you deserve. He felt that separation from God - the separation of death, and to you is given the gift of life.

Now we are told in Holy Scripture that when Jesus comes again in glory so, so many will try to run and hide. But that will not be you, because you don't run from Jesus today. You come to Him like dear children coming to their dear father.

It's not that you come here into the presence of your Lord acting as if you had no sin to confess. That's not who Jesus' children are. We're filthy with sin. We commit all kinds of disobedience. Not that we want to. But we are weak...all of us are.

Yet you come. You do not go and hide. You come with so much that needs forgiving because Jesus always forgives. He forgives you. He has no punishment for you. Only His love and favor. And this is good news for you. It's very easy to fear, especially as our last day approaches. We know what wretched sinners we have been throughout our life. We can have the same confusion John had. What if, on my last day, Jesus rejects me because of my sins?

Friend, the same Jesus who comes today in mercy, forgiving your sins, is He who will come on your last day to receive you into heaven. The words, "fear not" are His words to you today, tomorrow, every day of your life, and on your last day when you will see Him face to face. Therefore rejoice, now and always. Amen.