

+ In Nomine Jesu +

Matthew 11:2-15

Date: December 11, 2022

Liturgical Date: Advent 3, A

Title: The works of the Christ

*In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit*

In Psalm 146, the psalmist praises the Lord, “who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them,... who executes justice for the oppressed, who gives food to the hungry, who sets the prisoners free, who opens the eyes of the blind, who lifts up those who are bowed down.” The works of the Lord are glorious. Whenever you see the work, you know who does the work. When you see the beautiful creation all around, in the heavens or on the earth, or when you see new life in the smallest persons, you know that the Lord is doing that work.

Psalm 146 also speaks about the works of princes. “Put not your trust in princes, in a son of man, in whom there is no salvation. When this breath departs, he returns to the earth; on that very day his plans perish.” The works of princes and kings are significant in the present. The princes could do good works, commend the good and punish the evil, or the princes could do wicked works, commend the evil and punish the good. In any case, once the princes perish, their plans and their works are gone. When their breath departs, their works disappear like vapor.

The Christ, when he comes, will do works that are glorious. Isaiah sees beforehand, “Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.” The Christ, when he comes, will bring judgment, paying back everyone for the works that they have done. The Christ, when he comes, will bring good news and restore the bodies that are broken. When these glorious works happen, everyone will know that the Christ has come.

Now John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ. John hears the works that the Christ is doing. The Christ had cleansed a leper, telling him to show himself to the priest and offer the gift that Moses commanded. Jesus had healed a paralytic, forgiving his sins and sending him home carrying his own bed. Jesus had taken the hand of the dead little girl, and she arose. Jesus had touched the eyes of the two blind men, and even though Jesus told them, “don’t let anyone know about this,”... everybody knew. John knows. John hears of all of the miracles.

John hears in prison about the works of the Christ. John no longer occupies his preaching station by the Jordan, where all of Jerusalem and all of Judea were going out to hear him. The axe is laid to the root of the trees. A mightier one is coming after me. His winnowing fork is in his hand. He is coming to gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire. He is coming with vengeance, with the recompense of God. But now the number of people that come to John to hear him preach is quite small. John’s disciples still come

to hear. Herod is hearing as well.

John sends his disciples to the coming Christ. John is the messenger who goes before the Lord. The Lord is coming after John. The heavenly bridegroom comes, and John, the friend of the bridegroom heralds the bridegroom. John must decrease. The Christ must increase. The disciples bring the question from John in prison. Are you the coming one, or is there another that we should be expecting? Are you the one promised by the prophets, the one who does the works that only the Lord does, or should we keep waiting, expecting another?

The answer could be simple from Jesus. Yes, I am the coming one. The disciples would then go back to John in prison. He said yes. Great! Okay, then. But Jesus shows what his coming is as He answers. Go and report to John the things that you are hearing and seeing. The works of the Christ are no longer the object of patient waiting. The deeds that the prophets spoke of long ago are here. The prophets spoke in the name of the Lord. Now hear and see the works of the one who comes in the name of the Lord. You see the works, and you know who is doing the works - the long awaited Christ.

The blind are seeing again. Isaiah sees that the Lord would come to do this wonderful work. The lame are walking around, leaping like calves from the stall. The lepers who must yell "Unclean" are being cleansed by the word of the Lord. The deaf with their broken ears are made whole again as they are hearing. And the dead who have perished have salvation, as the creator speaks his recreating word to make all things new. And those who have nothing in this world, those who are mocked or even imprisoned by the powerful behold the beautiful feet of the Christ who brings good news.

You want your answer about the coming one? There it is. The works are your answer. Oh, and blessed is the one who does not stumble all the way to apostasy because of me. You know the words of the prophets. You know what they have said about the coming Christ. The Christ has come. Everything that is written in the prophets will be fulfilled. Have patience. Endure to the end. Strengthen your hearts. Even in suffering, hold fast that the Lord is coming.

John asks about the coming one. Jesus responds with the works. In the Christ's first coming, he comes with humility, with healing in his wings. The Christ's first coming is with a tender salvation. The Lord is compassionate and merciful. The Christ highlights these works in his answer. The bodies that are broken are restored. The report about these works that only the Lord can do goes all over the countryside. John points all of Jerusalem and Judea, and finally his disciples, to this Christ.

But what about all of the works of the Lord? Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you. John in prison could really use the Lord's vengeance right about now. Wicked Herod has locked up John and even thinks about killing him. How, when, is John going to get out of this unjust sentence? The Lord would save him and pay back that wicked king with the same sentence. The axe is already laid to the root of the trees. Everyone must turn from their evil deeds, even the king.

But for John in prison, the recompense does not come in time, in this life. Herod finally

gives the command. John the Baptist's head on a platter. The one who goes before the Lord dies an unjust death. John's disciples come and care for his body, burying him to await the resurrection. John is innocent, but put to death as if he were guilty, even as the Lord comes to take that road for all of mankind. The Lord will come and save you.

John is in prison. John is in prison not for a lengthy presentation on the Old Testament prophecies and their fulfillment in Christ. John is in prison not for his finger pointing out, "Behold, the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world". John is in prison for being a little too strict about who should be sleeping with whom. John was saying continually to Herod, you cannot have your brother's wife.

In the midst of an evil and adulterous generation, the faithful suffer. This adulterous generation objects furiously to John's admonition to it. You cannot have another man's wife. How is that John's business anyway, this generation would say. Nobody is hurting anyone with a little fornication. But John must speak the truth to the king so that John would confess a larger truth. The king is faithless when it comes to the sanctity of marriage. The Christ, the bridegroom who is coming, is always faithful to his bride, to his people, and even gives his life for his bride.

John is no reed blown to and fro by the wind. John doesn't remain silent concerning the word of the Lord, hoping someone else would speak up. John isn't found among those who wear the soft clothing. John does not have a flattering tongue to keep him safe in society. John is not like those whose lack of a backbone leads them to positions of power. John is a prophet, more than a prophet. John speaks in the name of the Lord. What can man do to him? What can the king do to him? The works of princes do not long endure. The prince's breath departs. His plans perish. Even the plans to stand against the coming reign of God are brought to nothing. The Lord is coming.

The Lord is coming again. The Lord's second advent is near. Then, all that Isaiah sees would come to pass. Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you. The Lord's second coming is for the final judgment. The judge is standing at the door. Justice will not be delayed forever. The Lord will pay back the evil deeds that are done unjustly to the faithful. With the coming of the Lord's judgment, repent and prepare for that day. Cast off the works of darkness. Make no provisions for the flesh, to gratify its desires. Walk in the way of peace and righteousness.

St. James encourages the faithful remnant to be steadfast in the midst of so many trials. The trials are to be counted as joy. The trials build steadfastness. Our riches and comforts are not found in the easy life in the present time. John the Baptist endures a trial for the sake of the word of the Lord. The prophets found that suffering was a blessing as they spoke in the name of the Lord. John's disciples were encouraged that the works of the Christ were the sign that the Lord had indeed come. And you have heard of the steadfastness of Job, how he was wealthy with many animals and possessions and many sons and daughters. But Satan was ready to have Job curse God to his face. Job lost everything - his animals, house, even his children. Job did not blame God for any of it. Job suffered, trusting that God would redeem him. The Lord restored the wealth to Job, giving him twice as much of everything - twice the animals, and again

the same number of children (which was double, as the first children who perished await with Job the coming Redeemer who lives who will give life to their dead flesh).

We have the prophets and Job and John the Baptist as examples of steadfastness while suffering. They are steadfast because they hold on to the coming one. Therefore do not fall into despair, as if you would be the only one who endures trials for confessing the truth. Do not put your eyes so much on the present time and what you could lose in this life that you take your eyes off of the coming Christ. Do not take on the role of yourself avenging the wrongs against you, not trusting that God would bring the appropriate justice at the proper time. Do not fall away from the faith because that would be an easier way than the way of the Christ. The kingdom of God does not advance with worldly successes, nor does the kingdom of God advance with our despair or fear. Rather the kingdom advances by the preaching that God is coming with his recompense, and He is coming to save you.

All of the beautiful saving works of the Christ will come at the second advent. The things that John's disciples were hearing and seeing are the same things that you will be hearing and seeing. 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.

The Lord will come and restore all things. The Lord who made heaven and earth will make all things new. The eyes of the blind will be seeing again. They shall see the face of the Lord, even as Job joyfully anticipates, "yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another." The lame will be walking around again when the Lord comes. The lame man shall leap like a deer. Whatever was broken on the body will be made new without any brokenness.

The lepers will be cleansed. The lepers were cleansed by blood. The blood of Christ cleanses these bodies, even our own bodies. Being cleansed means being part of the community of God's people, being in God's presence. At the second advent we will be in the Lord's presence in both body and soul, clean and pure before God. The deaf will be hearing, first when they hear the voice of Christ to come out of the tomb. At the second coming, the deaf will hear the new song in heaven. The deaf will hear the song of Moses - the song of the Lamb - Great and amazing are your works O Lord God the Almighty - and will sing the glory of the Lord.

The dead are raised up. The day is coming that we confess every week, even though we have never seen such a day. I look for the resurrection of the flesh. Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? The bodies that we lay in the ground, dust to dust, will awaken, just as our Lord is risen, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. We will hear and see all of these works of the Christ. The poor will have the good news preached to them, yes, because all of these works of the Christ are for you. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. Amen.

+ Soli Deo Gloria +

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