

Dear Gulf Coast Leaders,



December 12, 2010 - Advent 3A

Jesus comes to us in our prisons. (Satterlee.)

What are your expectations of the Messiah?

How are we imprisoned by our false expectations? In the cross Jesus meets us in our prison. What imprisons you?

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Jesus comes to us in our prisons. (Satterlee.) What are your expectations of the Messiah? How are we imprisoned by our false expectations? The cross is where Jesus meets us in our prison. What imprisons you?

[Isaiah 35:1-10](#) - Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.

[Psalm 146:5-10](#) - Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD...

OR

[Luke 1:47-55 - The Magnificat, Mary's Song](#) ... He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty...

[James 5:7-10](#) - Be patient, therefore, beloved, until the coming of the Lord.

[Matthew 11:2-11](#) - John sent word by his disciples to Jesus: 'Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?' Jesus answered them, 'Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them.'

Pointing away from yourself

In his sermon on this gospel text:

http://www.trinitylutheranms.org/MartinLuther/MLSermons/Matthew11_2_10.html

Martin Luther suggests John the Baptist had no doubt whatsoever that Jesus was the One to come. After all, he heard the voice from heaven at Jesus' baptism saying, "This is my Beloved Son..." (Matthew 3:17). So why did he send his disciples to Jesus to ask? If Matthew recorded the heavenly words at Jesus' baptism why would he then have John wondering at all?

Luther responds that John is doing this for the sake of his disciples, not himself, so that they, who are following him, might now believe in Jesus and follow him instead. "He must increase and I must decrease." (John 3:30) John knows his ministry and his life are coming to an end. He is allowing his disciples to get a



Christo Rey Gets a Bell Tower

OF NOTE

[Got a set of Luther's Works?](#)

[Members under 30 bailing on the church](#)

[Happy Hanukkah!](#)

[Advocacy and Immigration](#)

[New belfry at Cristo Rey Lutheran Church in Lima, Peru](#)

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[Upcoming Lectionary Readings](#)

UPCOMING EVENTS

January 24-26 - TriSynodical Theological Conference. Marcus Borg. Galveston.

Register NOW. Books to read:

1. [The Heart of Christianity.](#)
2. [Toward a Hopeful Future.](#)

March 9 - Ash Wednesday

April 24 - Easter

May 20-22 - Synod Assembly in Galveston,

taste of Jesus' ministry. John points his disciples away from himself.

Texas.

Faithful leaders always point beyond themselves. Egotistical leaders point to themselves. They elevate themselves. Egotistical spiritual leaders preach sermons that make people say, "Wow, he is great!" Servant spiritual leaders preach sermons that make people say "Wow, God is great!" The egotistical spiritual leader inspires people to increase his church for his glory. The servant spiritual leader inspires people to increase God's kingdom for God's glory.

Leaders that make a difference point to something bigger than themselves: the mission. John pointed to Jesus. Jesus pointed to God, and God's Mission: the Kingdom. To what or to whom are you pointing your people?

John invites his groupies to go and see Jesus for themselves. "Tell John what you see:

- Blind see
- lame walk
- lepers cleansed
- deaf hear
- dead raised
- good news preached to the poor."

John's disciples see Jesus' public ministry first hand. No hearsay. Experience the real deal.

I find it interesting that Jesus points to the outcomes. The proof of the pudding is in the eating. "Am I the real deal? You tell me. What do you see? And how does that line up with your understanding of the Kingdom?" One challenge churches have with evangelism is their people are embarrassed to say, "Come and see." They are afraid if they bring their unchurched friends, they'll find the church unfriendly, out of touch, bickering, or irrelevant. A recent article shows how dire the situation really is: <http://bishopmike.com/2010/12/04/this-comes-via-don-carlson-via-larry-keene/>

Is the tree bearing fruit? Is there healing going on? Hope? Are there signs of the kingdom of heaven in your church's worship, community, ministry? Is there any kind of transformation taking place in people's lives? Is there joy? Love? ("By this shall all people know you are my disciples: if you love one another." John 13:35) Is good news being preached to the poor?

Jesus said, "You shall know them by their fruit." Jesus is about results. Our theology often creeps into cheap grace. I often hear people quote "God doesn't call us to be successful; he calls us to be faithful." It's sometimes attributed to Mother Teresa - ironic given how prolific her ministry was. While I understand sometimes we work hard planting and don't always get to harvest, still this fear of results troubles me. The harvest is the point after all. I almost sense in some churches, if we do something good for the community we're just being do-gooders, and that's works-righteousness, so we better not do anything helpful, because we might be trying to earn our salvation.

The Bible may not talk about being successful, but there are plenty of passages about being fruitful. Trees that don't bear fruit are cut down and thrown into the fire. Jesus condemns the fig tree for not bearing fruit, thus criticizing the Temple in one gospel, and the religious leaders in another, for not bearing the fruits of repentance, justice and mercy, the weightier matters of the law. The manager criticizes his investor for burying his talent in the back yard. The kingdom like yeast, like a small seed that produces a huge tree that... bears fruit and provides nests for the birds.

If someone asked your members, "Our friends want to know if his Jesus, this church stuff, is the real deal..." could you say, "Tell them what you see... lives changed, people healed, dead men now walking...?"

Indeed Luther himself, in his sermon on this text, says things that would bother the purveyors of Lutheran neo-orthodoxy: "Here we have it stated that where the works are absent, there is also no Christ."

Where there are no works, there is no Christ. Just let that one sink in for a bit.

No, don't read on just yet. Think about that for a while.

Where there are no works, there is no Christ.

Faith, without works, is dead.

Luther goes on: "Christ is a living, active and fruit-bearing character who does not rest, but works unceasingly wherever he is. Therefore, those bishops

and teachers that are not doing the works of Christ, we should avoid and consider as wolves." Ouch.

John points to Jesus. Jesus points to the mission, the works, the fruit for signs that God is here, breaking in. Jesus doesn't even try to spin it, much: "Go tell John what you see..."

Could you do that? "Go tell your friends what you see going on here in this ministry..."

There's an irony in the last part: "...and the poor have good news proclaimed to them." Proclaiming the gospel turns out to be the pinnacle of good works. Luther takes this opportunity to do a little teaching on law and gospel. Apparently they gave him more than 10-12 minutes to preach. This sermon looks like an hour or more to me. (But then again, there was no TV back then...)

Why good news to the poor and not the rich? Luther says, "But my kingdom, because it seeks not its own advantage, but rather bestows benefits upon others, is sufficient of itself and needs no one's help; therefore, it can not bear to be surrounded by such as are already sufficient of themselves, such as are healthy, rich, strong, pure, active, pious, and able in every respect. To such I am of no benefit; they obtain nothing from me."

The gospel is for the hungry, physically and spiritually.

Good news for the poor encompasses any who are broken in any way. If you think you are not broken - if you have it all together - well, then Christ may be of no use to you. "God cannot fill what is already full." Another Mother Teresa quote. The only prerequisite for being filled with God's grace is you must be empty. The only prerequisite for being resurrected is you must be dead.

Christ comes, bringing good news to the poor, hope for the hopeless, joy for the sorrowful, healing for the brokenhearted. This is good news for you, and good news for you... to carry to others.

Be at peace with God and with one another,

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God's work. Our hands.