

Advent 1 | St. Matthew 18:15-22
Your King, Proclaims Your Liberty
and the Lord's Favor This Year

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Ser. #322-16

We pray: Dearest Jesus, our conquering King, we come before You to be freed from the tyranny of our enemies. Open our eyes, ears, and hearts by the power of Your Holy Comforter, so that we do not reject You who comes to us from the Father through such humble means. Amen.

In the name of your forgiving and gracious King, Jesus Christ.

Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Have you made your New Year's resolution yet?

Did you stay up late last night to celebrate the New Year?

I doubt it. I didn't, either.

But as you already heard, today is the first day
of the Christian Church year, being Advent 1.

The word 'advent' comes from the Latin meaning, 'coming.'

In Advent, we wait expectantly as we prepare for Christmas
to celebrate the coming of Christ,

not only as a baby who was born in Bethlehem,

but also as our Savior and King,

coming to Jerusalem to die on the cross,

and coming to the earth again on the Last Day

in His divine glory.

In our text for meditation today, Jesus came back to Nazareth
where He had grown up as a little boy.

While the people marveled at His "gracious words",
and heard Him declare Himself to be God's Anointed One,
the Christ,

their skewed expectations caused them to reject Him
and even to try to kill Him by throwing Him over a cliff.

Let us hear these words of God today and take heed,

that our expectations be aligned with and by Scripture,
so that as your King comes to you throughout this year
in Word and Sacrament, and proclaims your liberty
and God's favor, you receive it with joy
and marvel at His gracious words.

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We read as follows in Jesus' name.

And [Jesus] came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up.
And as was His custom, He went to the synagogue on the Sabbath
day, and He stood up to read. And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah
was given to Him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place
where it was written,

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me,

because He has anointed Me

to proclaim good news to the poor.

He has sent Me to proclaim liberty to the captives

and recovering of sight to the blind,

to set at liberty those who are oppressed,

to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

And He rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant
and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on
Him. And He began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been
fulfilled in your hearing." And all spoke well of Him and
marveled at the gracious words that were coming from His mouth.
And they said, "Is not this Joseph's son?"^(ESV) *So far the Words of our
text.*

These are Your Words, heavenly Father.

Sanctify [us] in the Truth. Your Word is Truth.^(John 17:17)

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Expectations are something that we live with.

As with all of God's blessings, they can be good, right, &salutary
but expectations can also be dangerous,

especially when they are misguided or overblown,

because they can distract us from reality.

Consider the little boy who expects that he will get
the latest and greatest video game on Christmas morning,

or the little girl who puts all her hope in receiving a make-up kit.
How disappointing is it for them if they happen not to get them?
It seems as if their whole celebration is ruined.

Perhaps they make a big fuss about it and spoil the festivities
for everyone else.

Or maybe he gets the video game but it isn't all
that it was hyped up to be.

Or her dreamed-for make-up kit is flimsy and breaks.

As Christmas comes, there are lots of expectations.

You may have family gatherings planned. Or workplace parties.

Maybe you expect to celebrate with certain foods/experiences.

Or you expect that someone new will join in the festivities.

These can all help build up the excitement and anticipation
of the coming of this year's Christmas.

We shouldn't minimize such things, but at the same time,
we should understand their proper place.

While we may expect the goodies, joys, company, and festivities
they are not the reason for our celebration.

Perhaps a person you were expecting to be there won't be
b/c he died, or you're now separated, or she's now estranged.

Would this be the end of your celebration of Christmas?

Are you looking forward to a Christmas bonus?

What if your employer couldn't afford it this year?

Would that spoil your festivities?

When such things, and any number of other disappointments
happen to you, there is certainly grief and sadness.

As much as we love to celebrate and expect happiness
and peace and joy during the Holy-days,
the devil loves to try to foil them with distractions
and temptations.

Take, for example, our text.

Ever since Adam first heard the promise of the Savior
who was to be born from Eve, born of a woman,

God's people had been expecting the Savior.
Then God promised Abraham a great number of descendants,
and the promised Land, & the Savior from among His people.
And then to King David, God promised that his Son,
would sit on David's throne forever
and subdue all their enemies and rule the world.
These were great and many promises.

Through the generations, to varying degrees,
they eagerly expected God's anointed King to arise.
But through those same generations,
the devil had led them astray. Of course, he wasn't alone.
Their own desires welling up from their sinful flesh
misguided their understanding of God's promises.
And the world's understanding of what a divine King
should be and look like were very tempting and alluring.

But when Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God and Eve
and Abraham and David and Mary (and Joseph),
came on the scene and claimed to be God's Anointed, the Christ,
they would not endure it.

Their misbelief of Isaiah's prophecy had them expecting
and dreaming of an earthly, political king,
granting fleshly liberties to his people,
not some common looking bloak they all knew.

We aren't immune from such things, are we?

How often do we wish, even pray for, God to show His power
and glory to the world so that they will know?
How many times have you found yourself struggling,
even losing, against temptations to be angry at God
because He allowed something to happen to you/loved one?
At such times, aren't you disappointed in God
because He did not meet your expectations?

You might even try to justify your disappointment saying
that God promised to protect His people,
to provide for all your needs,

to speak comfort to His people, yet all you feel is guilt.

But are we truly justified whenever we are disappointed in God?

Consider what Isaiah prophesied about the Christ:
that He would be sent from the Father to proclaim
and to set at liberty, to free, the oppressed.

In their own hearing, Jesus proclaimed to them their freedom.

They even marveled at His gracious words,
which doesn't sound to me an awful lot like King's words.
What freedom was Jesus proclaiming, from Roman oppression?
No, but freedom from the oppression of the devil,
who had enslaved us to following the sinful pursuits
and expectations of our corrupted flesh.

The poor to whom He preached good news
were not just the financially poor,
but the poor in spirit, those humbled by their mistaken views
of how God should be acting in their lives,
those longing to hear the good news, "You're forgiven."

As they critiqued His proclamation, they spoke well of Him.

And yet, they saw only a disappointment,
what they assumed to be the regular son of Joseph;
nothing special about him, no royal seal, no army,
only a craftsman's boy speaking beyond His station.

Eventually, the false expectation of the Jewish leaders,
driven by Satan's rage and oppression would lead them
to drive Jesus to the cross.

But this was the devil's mistake.

He, too, did not understand that Jesus' sacrificial death
would be his own demise.

It was there on the cross that Jesus set you free,
free from the burden of the Law,
free from the tyranny of the devil.

He set you at liberty, you who were Satan's captive,
now to be God's child and to receive the Lord's favor,

not just today, but through out the whole year,
and year after year after year.

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I said earlier that expectations are also a good thing, a blessing,
especially when they are proper and correctly prioritized.

This Church Year, Sunday after Sunday, festival after festival,
you should expect to see your sins for the evil that they are.
You should expect to return to your Baptism, in confession
to be relieved of your burden of misguided expectations
and self-justifications.

And to hear about Jesus Christ and how He justified you,
declared and proclaimed you right with God.

To hear of His life and His teachings and how these
set you free from Satan's tyranny.

You should expect, Service after Service, to hear the good news
proclaimed to you, 'Your sins are forgiven.'

You should expect to receive heaven's humble crucified King
& Mary's glorious resurrected Son come to you,
lowly and bodily in bread and wine.

If you come this year with these expectations,

God grant you never to be disappointed here in His house.

Glory to God in the Highest, and on Earth Peace, Goodwill toward men!.

Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria