



"Celebrate Messiah: Hope Strongly"

The Third Sunday of Advent
5:30 p.m. Saturday, December 9, 2016
The Reverend John H. Brock
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

James 5:7-70; Matthew 11:2-11

Grace to you and peace, from God who is, who was, and who is to come. Amen.

John Glenn died this week. This was a man who, I think, all of us can agree, was an American hero. He had so many accomplishments in his life: he was a Marine *and* combat pilot, flying both in World War II and Korea; he was an astronaut - not only as the *first* human to orbit the earth, but *also* as the *oldest* human in space. He was a Senator for the state of Ohio for over twenty years. And he did all this in addition to being a husband, father, & son. To do and be all those things, in my opinion, he had to be someone who was filled with strength, love, intellect, faith, and hope.

Over the past few days, there have been several tributes to him. The one that struck me the most, however, and unfortunately I don't remember *where* I heard it, so I can't quote it exactly, but I'll paraphrase it; as he was talking about his historic solo flight around the earth, he said
'It occurred to me that everything on the craft I was depending on for my life was built by the *lowest bidder*.'

Trusting your life to the lowest bidder took, I think, a lot of faith, and a lot of hope.

John the Baptizer was a man filled with hope, as well. Or at the least, in a man *seeking* hope. At this point in Matthew's gospel, John has been arrested (for Matthew, this happens fairly early on, way back in Chapter 4. We're not given any details, simply that John has been arrested. We won't find out until Chapter 14 that he was arrested for having the *gall* to tell King Herod that it was *not* legal to make his sister-in-law his own wife, because her husband (his brother Philip) was forced to divorce her so Herod could have her) (yeah, I know, it sounds like a soap opera). John is in prison, and while there, apparently, he begins to have doubts about his life's work thus far. So, he sends a message to Jesus via his own disciples, and asks a pretty basic question. It's actually a question that, in all likelihood, *all* of us have wondered about, at some time or another.

John asks:

"Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" (V.3)

To be honest, I can relate to this question. And I can understand how, locked away in the palace prison, probably knowing he faces certain death, John might be a bit down, and is looking for some hope. He is looking for a bright spot in his day, something to hold on to. It doesn't matter that he was the one to baptize Jesus, and heard the voice proclaiming

This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased (3:17);

or that he himself had been declaring that Jesus was the one to come after him, whose sandals he was not worthy to untie. (3:11)

John had hit that patch, that dark place that *all* of us hit at some time, and he needed some reassurance, some light, some hope, to confront his personal shadow.

His disciples deliver the question to Jesus, And Jesus seems to give a snarky answer:

"Go and tell John what you hear and see: ⁵ 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.

I say snarky, because I can almost imagine John thinking:

*Hey, Jesus, you know, that's great for the blind, lame, deaf & recently dead. But **I'm** still in prison.*

Yet I think Jesus is saying this in the tone of:

I cannot answer that for you. You need to look at what is happening, see what I am doing. What do you see? Can you believe in one who does not fit your preconceived idea of what a Messiah is "supposed" to be?

We don't know how John received that answer. We don't know if it gave him the hope he needed, or if it sent him into a deeper funk than he was already in. I have *hope* that Jesus' answer satisfied John doubt.

Still, this is the time of year that many of us look at our loves and have our doubts. The darkening days, the long nights, the coming Winter Solstice, all add to that sense of dread, doom, and foreboding, that unfortunately too many of us have to deal with at this time of year. This Jesus, this Messiah, this Christ, seeks to bring us hope; seeks to bring us new life; light in this darkened world.

I don't know what your dark place might be. Maybe it's personal illness. Perhaps a family member is facing illness: cancer, stroke, or dementia. And you're wondering how God could let this happen, why you or your loved one is suffering. I can't answer that for you. I can only tell you what I believe, which is, we live in an imperfect world. We live in a world where infants die, people we love get cancer, where dementia is real.

We **also** live in a world where there are medical procedures and medicine that by standards of one hundred, fifty, even *twenty* years ago, seem as if they are *miracles*. We live in a world where an earthquake can happen halfway around the world, and we not only *know* about it within a matter of *minutes*, but are able to send relief aid, food, and money, to aid those who in a matter of seconds lost everything. We live in this world, where our faith tells us to help those who are in need; to give shelter to those who do not have any; to love the outcasts, the social rejects, the AIDs patient and the recovering alcoholic; those who don't look like us; to love them *just as much* as we love those who give generously, of not only their time but of their wallet; to love them *just as much* as we love those who look the same as us, or talk with no discernable accent.

We are called to live in this world of *sin*, this world *without* hope, **and** be the witness of Christ's grace and love and forgiveness, . . . and hope, that this world needs to hear.

We don't have to be an astronaut, or a senator, or a prophet in a camel's hair shirt; we are *called* to be *ourselves*: a child of God; a witness of Christ; a bringer of hope.

Amen.

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