

Sermon 2007 Advent 3

Text: Matthew 11:2-6

Theme: "Doubting Is Believing"

I have a book on my shelf called "Bad Girls of the Bible." It traces the way God has used people whom the Church might have labeled as "bad" to serve God's higher purposes. I have often looked for a book called "Doubters of the Bible." I think that would be a good book, because there is a pretty amazing list of people who doubted God.

Adam and Eve doubted that the fruit from that tree would harm them. Moses doubted that God could use him to deliver Israel. John the Baptist doubted that his cousin could be the Christ. Peter doubted that Christ's crucifixion could save anyone. Thomas doubted that Christ had risen from the dead. So you and I are pretty fair company when we entertain doubts!

Who doesn't doubt? Everyone doubts from time to time. Whenever we are faced with the hard to explain, the incongruent, the paradoxical; we wonder, "what if we are not right?" If God is all powerful, then why do his people suffer? If God is all knowing,

then why did he create the situation in the garden that would one day lead to sin? Every thinking person sometimes wonders if there is a God. And if there is a God, is he paying any attention at all to what is going on around here?

To me, the saddest thing is not when a person doubts, but when that person is told that he or she is no longer a part of God's family because he doubts. Are you kidding me? The Church is the place for doubters. This is where doubters come every week for forgiveness and strength.

John the Baptist doubted he came clean with Jesus and sent his disciples to ask him. Are you the one or should we look for another? John knew the words of the prophet. Isaiah had been specific about what the Messiah would do. The Messiah would heal physical ailments as a foreshadowing of the spiritual disease of sin that he would cure with his own life and soul. But even though Jesus was fulfilling the prophets words left and right John still doubted. So Jesus made it plain.

"Go and tell John what you hear and see: 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." Touché John. Stop doubting and believe! But look how gentle Jesus is with John; how patient. That's where we fall down at times.

See, not everyone is at the same place in his or her faith walk and doubting is part of the walk. By the time James writes his epistle, he is the Bishop of Jerusalem writing to people who are being persecuted by the Romans and the Jews. It is easy to begin to doubt when life is painful and difficult.

"Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains." Pastor Beach over at Epiphany Lutheran says it this way,

"You can't make a bean plant grow any quicker by pulling on it." Likewise, faith grows at its own rate. You can feed it and

exercise it but it grows as fast as it grows and you can't hurry it.

James goes on,

"You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged...."

It is so easy to become impatient with one another. Parents want their children to be where they are in faith. And sometimes it is the children who are ahead of the parents and they become even more impatient because they think that the older person should automatically have more faith, but of course faith does not work that way. Faith is not necessarily connected to chronology at all because it all depends on how well it is fed and exercised. Siblings and friends do the same thing to each other. Demanding that doubters believe will do nothing but cause heartache, animosity and feelings of low self-worth. Doubters are healed only with love, gentleness and patience as faith grows.

Advent is the season for doubters. Advent is the season of waiting for the Lord to appear again in the flesh, to become

manifest for us. As we wait, we feed on the body and blood of Christ and are watered in Holy Baptism. One day we will see him coming on the horizon and suddenly we will know by sight that which we have only known by faith. On that day, all ills will be healed and all wrongs will be righted. On that day, all faith will be perfected and doubt will no longer plague any of us.

Until that day...we doubters can do is look at the works he does in our lives and believe the best we can. The love of a child. The beauty of a rose. The magnificence of the bright sunlight on the newly fallen snow. The way the Lord provides for us in ways we are not even expecting. The miracles that happen each day all around us if we are looking for them. Jesus comes now. Stop doubting and believe. If he does all that he does now, imagine what he will do when he comes again in the flesh. AMEN.