

The Fourth Sunday in Advent

December 20, 2020

Pastor Daniel Naumann

John 1:19-29

**THE LORD IS NEAR—  
DON'T MISS HIM!**



It's happened to me more times than I'd care to admit, and it's probably happened to you too. You're looking for something that you know you just had in your hand, searching high and low for it, but you just for the life of you cannot find it. Finally, after searching for far too long, you find what you've been

missing in the most obvious place possible, the place where you should have been looking all along. Maybe you've misplaced your keys—they're not on the hook or in the drawer or on the desk and you think you've lost them only to find in your coat pocket. Or perhaps you've misplaced a form or document that you had to fill out, but suddenly it's not on the desk or under the computer or in the file or on the counter, and then finally you find it hours later in the special envelope where you specifically tucked it in so that you wouldn't forget where it is. We do this rather frequently don't we, when we forget where something is but it's in the most obvious place available.

In today's Gospel reading, we see that people had misplaced a very important prophecy. They had lost a grasp on what it means that the Christ was coming. And even though the prophecies couldn't have been clearer, and the people even at times demonstrate that they know where to find out information on what to expect when the Christ came, they also plainly show that they didn't know him when he came. The people missed the Christ. Do we run the risk of doing the same this coming Christmas?

In our Gospel for this morning, we get to take a look at John the Baptist again, but not in prison and not in a desperate situation. No, we get to see John the Baptist at his finest. We get to hear his very clear confession about both himself and about the Christ. Some Jewish leaders had sent a delegation, a group of spiritual leaders, to John to find out more about him. *"This is the testimony John gave when the Jews from Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him, 'Who are you?'"* (19) And John gives a crystal clear confession, a response that could not have been misunderstood. The text itself emphasizes this. *"He confessed and did not deny. He confessed, 'I am not the Christ'"* (20).

Now, already you get the impression that the Jewish people were missing something. It seems that many had confused John the Baptist as the very Messiah they were looking for. That's why John needed to make it abundantly clear that he was not the promised Messiah, the Christ, the Anointed One chosen by God to save the world from sin. Yet there were so many prophecies about the Christ and his coming that the people needed to clarify about John. *"And they asked him, 'Who are you then? Are you Elijah?' He said, 'I am not.' 'Are you the Prophet?' 'No,' he answered. Then they asked him, 'Who are you? Tell us so we can give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?'"* (21-22) It seems to us a bit odd that John denies that he is Elijah here, because Jesus calls him the one who came in the spirit of Elijah, the forerunner of the Christ, which is exactly who John was. So, why did John deny that? Very simply, it's because the people had their own ideas about the Christ, about this return of Elijah, and about the prophet, whom we know is Jesus prophesied in Deuteronomy 18 (which

we heard earlier). John had no interest in fostering an idea in the people that he was anything more than the forerunner of Jesus.

That's why he gave this profoundly simple yet important testimony about himself. *"He said, 'I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, "Make straight the way of the Lord," just as Isaiah the prophet said'"* (23). John was nothing more than a voice. He was the mouthpiece of God as he prepared people to meet the Savior. Yet the people missed the Savior. Despite this clear testimony that couldn't be misunderstood, the people didn't know Jesus when they saw him. *"They had been sent from the Pharisees. So they asked John, 'Why then do you baptize, if you are not the Christ, or Elijah, or the Prophet?' 'I baptize with water,' John answered. 'Among you stands one you do not know. He is the one coming after me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to untie'"* (24-26). The people missed the Christ, even though he was right in front of them.

Dear friends, Christmas is fast approaching. It's coming this very week. You've doubtless made preparations for that. Perhaps you've put up a Christmas tree (or several). Maybe you've done some Christmas shopping and wrapped gifts. Maybe you've put up lights outside your house and done some special baking that you don't do at any other time of year. You've made preparations for the coming of Christ. But have you missed what is right in front of you all along? Have you missed preparing for Jesus, the Savior of the world? Perhaps you have, and that's why you've come. Or perhaps you're thinking that you have not missed preparing for Jesus, in fact that's why you're here now and have been here all along this Advent. And I pray that that's the case. I pray that you have prepared appropriately. I pray that you're more like John the Baptist who clearly knew what he needed to know about the Christ, than you are like the Jewish people and leaders who missed the obvious. But here's a little test to see if you're prepared for Christ's coming. Can you say what this text says about John? Can you say that you have confessed clearly and have not denied, but have confessed the truth about

Christ at Christmas? If someone comes to your house this Christmas to visit, will there be any doubt in their minds about what is at the very center of your celebration? If you have a conversation with someone whom you've never met before, and the topic of Christmas comes up, will they have any doubt about what Christmas means to you? Do you confess clearly the truth about the Christ, or have you missed what is right in front of you all along?

Dear friends, I don't always confess Christ clearly like John did, and I know that you struggle with that as well. In an age that is becoming less and less moral and where these basic Christian tenets are more and more challenged and harder and harder to maintain, it becomes even more important for us to confess clearly about Christ. Yet so often we fail at that. We miss the obvious. That's why John the Baptist wanted to point Jesus out to people of his day just as his faithful testimony stands also today.



*"The next day, John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, 'Look! The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!'"* (29)

There was no doubt in anyone's mind what John was talking about when he clearly confessed the truth about Christ. This wasn't just another man who came from the people to make them happy. This wasn't Elijah come back from his whirlwind ride up to heaven. This wasn't just another prophet trying to get a gathering. This wasn't some physical messiah who would liberate Israel. This was the very Lamb of God, just like all the other lambs who had been sacrificed on altars throughout the Old Testament during so many Passovers, except that this Lamb of God actually took away the sin of the world. That's who Jesus is. That's what he came to do. And John pointed his finger right at him and made that confession clear to anyone who would listen. There was no doubt when you walked away from John's testimony and preaching about who the Christ really was and what he came to accomplish for us.

Dear friends, John's clear confession and his true testimony continue to speak volumes to us today as we prepare to meet the Christ also. This Jesus was not a folklore figure. He is not just a good guy to

make a statue of so that we can have a nice trinket to look at. He is not just another piece of history to learn about, or a nice bedtime story to tell our kids and grandkids. He is not just a reason to give presents and decorate and bake for. He is not just a good luck charm that we can call on to make this life easier or our days brighter. This Jesus is much more than anything we could hope to find anywhere else. He is our Savior from sin. He is the reason we can stand before God the Father guilt-free, with sin forgiven completely. He is the very Son of God who came in the flesh to sacrifice himself on the altar of the cross for our sins, so that he could take them away forever. What an astounding truth that is for us to cherish! What an amazing picture John the Baptist bids us to look at when we consider who Christ really is. Don't miss him, he is near, and he has come to forgive his people. He is the Lamb of

God, chosen by God and perfect in every way, so that he could be offered as a sacrifice for our sins so that we would not have to pay the punishment for them. And that's what Christmas is all about. It's about the coming of the Savior of the world for us, and we will celebrate that again this Christmas.

And that joy which this season brings because of Jesus, the Christ, is not just something that we hoard for ourselves. We share it with anyone willing to listen. We shout it from the rooftops that our peace and joy this Christmas truly comes from the Christ-child, who came to remove sin from this sin-stained world. He comes to bring a peace with God that no other sacrifice could bring.

Don't miss the obvious this Christmas season, dear friends. See, Christ comes to you. He comes to save you. And that's why we celebrate this Christmas. Amen.

REJOICE  
IN THE LORD  
ALWAYS