

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

[Jesus said:] ***"Blessed is the one who is not offended by Me"*** (Luke 7:23).

What does it take for someone or something to offend you? Can you recall the last time you were genuinely offended? What caused the offense? How did it make you feel? Angry? Shocked? Vengeful? What was your response? Was it something like, "How dare you!?" "How dare you question me!?" "How dare you accuse me!?"

Jesus was no stranger to "How dare you!" His earthly ministry may have lasted only three years, but it was enough time to offend all sorts of people in all sorts of ways. Some, like the Pharisees, were offended because He disappointed them with the way He demonstrated His messianic calling. The Gospels record how over and over again, people were scandalized or offended by something Jesus said or did, or even by something He did not do.

There were times when Jesus' words were just too hard to swallow. In John 6, Jesus proclaims to the crowd of fellow Jews that He is The Bread of Life. The crowd grumbled about Jesus, because He said, ***"I am the Bread that came down from heaven"*** (John 6:42). Later on, Jesus said to them, ***"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you"*** (John 6:53). Because of those words of Jesus, many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with Him. They took offense! They packed up their bags and left.

But Jesus didn't stop there at offending the masses. Later in John 8, Jesus said, ***"Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am"*** (John 8:58). Immediately, the crowd picked up stones to stone Jesus to death, but Jesus hid Himself. They took offense! This time they tried to eliminate Jesus for good!

In Luke 4, Jesus returned to Nazareth where He had been brought up. It was the Sabbath, so He came to synagogue. As a favorite son of the congregation, He was asked to read, so 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” (Luke 4:18-19). Then Jesus sat down and began to say, ***“Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing”*** (Luke 4:21). Then murmuring began, ***“Is not this Joseph’s son?”*** (Luke 4:22). The crowd was filled with wrath, and they rose up to drive Jesus out of Nazareth with intentions to throw Him off a cliff. Those synagogue worshipers took offense at Jesus! Again, they too wanted to eliminate Him.

But it wasn’t only Jesus’ speaking that caused offense. It was also what He was doing. On a Sabbath, Jesus had the audacity to give sight to a blind man. In response to this sign and miracle, some of the Pharisees said, ***“This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath”*** (John 8:16).

Jesus was also judged by the company He kept. And Jesus was well aware of what was being said about Him and His company.

After Jesus met with John’s disciples, He began preaching to the crowds concerning John the Baptist, saying, ***“For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine, and you say, ‘He has a demon.’ The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, ‘Look at Him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’”*** (Luke 7:33-34).

Just think about how many of the Jewish authorities took offense as Jesus ate and drank and even associated with sinners. The truth is, Jesus ate and drank and associated with these people, because He was always around sinners. He could never escape that fact, for ***“all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”*** (Romans 3:23). But Jesus ***never*** gave tax collectors permission to collect more taxes than authorized to do. Jesus ***never*** gave permission to prostitutes to continue selling themselves. Jesus ***never*** gave permission to Samaritans to continue worshipping falsely. What Jesus did do was show them their sins so they would repent of those sins and receive God’s forgiveness.

But it wasn’t only what Jesus said and did that caused so many to reject Him. For many others, it was what Jesus failed to do that caused the greatest offense. Think back to the First Sunday in Advent when we heard how the people greeted Jesus on that Palm Sunday spreading their cloaks on the road and laying down palm branches as they shouted their “Hosannas”! ***“Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”*** (Luke 19:38).

Most on that Palm Sunday believed that Jesus was the conquering hero who would lead them to political and military victory against the Romans. But how disappointed they must have been to see Him riding in on a donkey instead of a warhorse. How disappointed, discouraged, and offended they were when Jesus turned out to be a compassionate and forgiving Messiah, full of mercy and not vengeance. He wasn't what the crowd was expecting. By Friday, many in that Palm Sunday crowd changed their shout to "Crucify Him!"

With so many expectations not fulfilled. With Jesus appearing to be involved in scandal after scandal, John the Baptist, while in prison, sends two of his disciples to Jesus with the question, "***Are you the One who is to come, or shall we look for another?***" (Luke 7:20).

From the man who attempted to prevent Jesus' baptism saying, "***I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?***" (Matthew 3:14) and later witnessed the Spirit of God descend like a dove and rest on Jesus and heard God the Father proclaim from heaven: "***This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased***" (Matthew 3:17) – is this man having doubts? How could he have any doubts?

So, why this question of doubt? Is John *really* wavering in his faith? Or could it be that John desires that his disciples be certain of who Jesus truly is? Jesus wasn't really living up the expectations of the promised Messiah.

So, to clear up any doubts, Jesus directs John's disciples to His miracles: "***The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them***" (Luke 7:22). Then Jesus concludes saying, "***Blessed is the one who is not offended by Me***" (Luke 7:23).

Those words, "***Blessed is the one who is not offended by Me***" certainly do ring loud and clear. We certainly do live in a time where many are scandalized by Jesus Christ. Even with the coming Christmas holiday, many people are scandalized today by saying, "Merry Christmas" or even setting foot in a church on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day, but they will make sure that they have all their gifts in good order.

Even for us today, there are many exclusive claims of Jesus that may even cause *you* to be offended by Him. Jesus says, "***I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me***" (John 14:6).

Well, what about devout Jews? What about those good and sincere people who do many good works in the community, but do not trust in Jesus? Are they bound to hell because they don't happen to believe and trust in Jesus as their Savior?

For many of us, we get caught off guard. We would rather try to rationalize those words of Jesus. Or we can say, "It's not for me to judge." Or, "That's up to God." Well, it is up to God, but it's deeper than that. We may be tempted to be too squeamish to defend the Christian truth. But the truth is the truth. Jesus is the *only* way to salvation! Even now, Jesus doesn't live up to *our* expectations.

So, why do we often fail to let our Christian light shine? Why do we become so easily discouraged when it comes to matters of Christian faith and Christian hope? Why are we afraid? Are we worried what other people may think of us?

For all the doubts and worries we may have, Jesus says, "***The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel***" (Mark 1:15). So, repent and confess your sins to God, hand them over to Jesus, and then receive forgiveness by God's grace.

Jesus redeemed you and I when we were lost and condemned. He purchased and won us from all sin, from eternal death, and from the power of the devil with His holy and precious blood and by His innocent suffering and death.

Jesus called us by the Gospel. He sent the Holy Spirit to enlighten us with His gifts. He has sanctified and kept us in the one true Christian faith. All this He did out of His fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness on our part.

So, blessed are those who are not offended by Jesus! May we always be reminded of His blessings of forgiveness, eternal life, and salvation for which He won for you and me upon the cross!

On this Third Sunday in Advent, let us rejoice in Christ's Means of Grace! Rejoice in your Baptism into Christ! Rejoice in absolution as Christ forgives our troubled consciences! Rejoice in Christ's body and blood under bread and wine as our medicine for immortality! Rejoice in the Lord always! Blessed is the one who is not offended by Jesus! Amen.

*The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.*

+ SOLI DEO GLORIA +