

**Luke 7:18-23 (Third Sunday in Advent—Series C)**  
**“With Mercy, Compassion, and Forgiveness”**  
**Lutheran Church of Our Redeemer, Enfield CT**  
**December 12, 2021**

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.  
 Amen.

The text is from the Gospel lesson recorded in Luke 7:

<sup>18</sup>And [John’s] disciples reported to John concerning all these things. And John summoned two of his disciples <sup>19</sup>and sent them to the Lord, saying, “Are you the Coming One or should we wait for another.” <sup>20</sup>And after they had come to Him, the men said, “John the Baptist sent us to you, saying, ‘Are you the Coming One or should we wait for another?’” <sup>21</sup>In that hour He healed many from diseases and sufferings and evil spirits and many blind people received their sight. <sup>22</sup>And He answered and said to them, “Go, report to John that which you saw and heard: the blind received sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear; the dead are raised, the poor have the good news announced to them. <sup>23</sup>And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.”

I want you to imagine with me for a moment. Imagine that you are sitting, not here in this church, but in the synagogue in Nazareth. Someone who grew up in your assembly is home and is given the opportunity to read the Scripture and offer comment. Jesus, the son of Joseph and Mary, was given the scroll of the prophet Isaiah to read. He unrolled the scroll and found Isaiah 61:1-2, “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 4:16–21 ESV).

As you were listening to Jesus reading this text of God’s word, you wonder why He stopped there. You know that the passage continues: “to proclaim the year of the LORD’s favor, **and the day of vengeance of our God**” (Is. 61:2 ESV).

This passage from Isaiah is about Yahweh’s promised Messiah, the “Anointed One” who is also “the Coming One.” Many Jews expected this Messiah to come “in wrath to

execute vengeance upon those they considered to be the enemies of God and Israel.”<sup>1</sup> But this Jesus of Nazareth, citing the fulfillment of this Scripture “in your hearing,” shows that His miracles and teachings do identify His as this Messiah. But where is the vengeance? Where is the wrath of God against the devil, the world, and the sinful flesh?

This probably lies at the heart of John the Baptist’s question. John was in King Herod’s dungeon. He had called out the sin in Herod’s life—adultery—taking his brother’s wife to be his own. While in prison, John’s disciples reported all the things that Jesus was doing: the healing of the centurion’s servant, the raising of the son of the widow of Nain. John had heard about Jesus’ preaching and teaching about the reign and rule of God and about His miracles. And maybe He wondered, “Are you, Jesus, the Coming One, or should we wait for another? You are showing the mercy, compassion, and forgiveness of the Messiah. But what about the wrath and vengeance? What about the work of judgment and the swinging of the winnowing fork and the cutting of the ax that is already laid to the root of the tree?” Would another follow Jesus who would perform these works of judgment or is Jesus the One?

In the Old Testament, we have many references to God’s judgment against sin that would happen when the Messiah came on the scene. Isaiah 13:9 and 13, “Behold, the day of the LORD comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger, to make the land a desolation and to destroy its sinners from it. . . . Therefore I will make the heavens tremble, and the earth will be shaken out of its place, at the wrath of the LORD of hosts in the day of his fierce anger.”

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur A. Just, Jr. *Luke 1:1-9:50*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia, 1996), 314.

The prophet Zephaniah announced, "A day of wrath is that day, a day of distress and anguish, a day of ruin and devastation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of trumpet blast and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the lofty battlements. I will bring distress on mankind, so that they shall walk like the blind, because they have sinned against the LORD; their blood shall be poured out like dust, and their flesh like dung. Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them on the day of the wrath of the LORD" (Zeph. 1:15–18 ESV).

Quite honestly, I would not be looking forward to this "day of the LORD." I would not be waiting in hopeful anticipation of the Coming One who brings the day of vengeance of our God, knowing that I would be at the center of that vengeance. The day of vengeance and wrath, the day of judgment, has to come because we have sinned against the Lord. Sin merits punishment. I'm sorry that's not a popular idea in our so-called "modern society" where everyone does what is right in his or her own eyes (Deut. 12:8; Judg. 17:6; 21:25; Prov. 12:15; 21:2). God has an absolute standard that cannot be disobeyed. That disobedience earns for the disobeyer God's wrath and punishment. "If you, O LORD, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand?" (Psa. 130:3 NIV). No one!

"The day of vengeance of our God" is the day of His judgment against HIS enemies. Sinners, like you and me, are God's enemies by our very nature. Again, not a popular idea in today's world, but true, nonetheless. Paul in Romans 5:10 speaks of us sinners as God's "enemies." In Ephesians 2:3, the apostle writes that we humans are "by nature children of wrath," God's wrath and displeasure because we have failed to fear, love, and trust in God above all things. We have failed to love our neighbors as ourselves (Eph. 2:3). The Reformers

confessed in the Formula of Concord, "Likewise, we believe, teach, and confess that the unregenerate will of mankind is not only turned away from God, but also has become God's enemy. So it only has an inclination and desire for that which is evil and contrary to God, as it is written in Genesis 8:21, "the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth." Romans 8:7 says, "The mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot."<sup>2</sup>

To be sure, the time of God's wrath against sin and sinner will come. The Church confesses in the Athanasian Creed that Jesus Christ "ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father, God Almighty, from whence He will come to judge the living and the dead. At His coming all people will rise again with their bodies and give an account concerning their own deeds. And those who have done good will enter into eternal life, and those who have done evil into eternal fire." We affirm the Biblical view of this day of judgment in the Augsburg Confession, citing 1 Thessalonians 4 and Matthew 25, "Our churches teach that at the end of the world Christ will appear for judgment and will raise all the dead [1 Thessalonians 4:13–5:2]. He will give the godly and elect eternal life and everlasting joys, but He will condemn ungodly people and the devils to be tormented without end [Matthew 25:31–46]."<sup>3</sup>

The time of God's wrath against sin and sinner will come. People's sins and shortcomings are still offenses against God for which He will hold people fully accountable.

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<sup>2</sup> Paul Timothy McCain, ed., *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2005), 477–478.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Timothy McCain, ed., *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2005), 40.

But the writer to the Hebrews focuses us on the Messiah's first coming with words of comfort and assurance. Hebrews 9:26-28, "But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him."

This is a Gospel message. In His first Coming, His first advent, Jesus reveals Himself primarily as a Messiah of mercy, compassion, and forgiveness, and not one of vengeance and wrath. Jesus came to serve, to seek, and to save. His ministry, as He showed to John and his disciples, was at that time *not* to execute judgment (that would come later.) It was the time of mercy and compassion when the Messiah would *absorb* God's wrath and punishment as if He were the guilty one.

Remember Jesus' reading to you in the synagogue at Nazareth? "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." He cut the reading short! Jesus didn't include "the day of vengeance of our God." The Messiah Himself was saying something profound about His own ministry and He reveals the same to John and to us! "Go, report to John that which you saw and heard: the blind received sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear; the dead are raised, the poor have the good news announced to them. And blessed is the one who is not offended by me." Jesus came with mercy, compassion, and forgiveness for human sinners. Out of His great love, He absorbed the

vengeance of God's wrath against His enemies, including us and our sins. On the cross, Jesus became the sin-bearer. He became God's enemy in our place. He suffered the day of vengeance of our God. He took God's wrath and fierce anger upon Himself on that Good Friday of cosmic darkness and gloom when God the Son died on the cross, humanity's once-for-all sacrifice for sin.

This is why Jesus' earthly ministry was filled with miracles of forgiveness and release for those who were in bondage to sin, sickness, and death. As the hymnwriter penned,

He comes the pris'ners to release,  
 In Satan's bondage held.  
 The gates of brass before Him burst,  
 The iron fetters yield.

He comes the broken heart to bind,  
 The bleeding soul to cure,  
 And with the treasures of His grace  
 To enrich the humble poor. (*LSB* 349:2-3)

Yes, Jesus is the Coming One, the Messiah, whose first Advent as God and Man brought mercy, compassion, and forgiveness to all humanity. Through His sacrificial death and resurrection from the dead, your sins are marked in His holy blood, "Paid In Full!" You are no longer God's enemy, but His beloved child, washed in the life-saving and life-changing waters of Holy Baptism. It is this Lord and King, Jesus, who will come again to judge both the living and the dead. For those apart from Christ, without saving faith in Christ, without the forgiveness of Christ, it will be a day of vengeance for our God. But for you who are in Christ Jesus, it will be a day of joy and blessing as He brings you who eagerly wait for Him into His new creation with life everlasting.

Once He came in blessing,  
All our sins redressing;  
    Came in likeness lowly,  
    Son of God most holy;  
Bore the cross to save us;  
Hope and freedom gave us.

Soon will come that hour  
When with mighty power  
    Christ will come in splendor  
    And will judgment render,  
With the faithful sharing  
Joy beyond comparing.

Come, then, O Lord Jesus,  
From our sins release us.  
    Keep our hearts believing,  
    That we, grace receiving,  
Ever may confess You  
Till in heav'n we bless You.<sup>4</sup> Amen.

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<sup>4</sup> *LSB* 333. Text (sts. 2–3): © 2006 Concordia Publishing House. Used by permission: LSB Hymn License no. 110000752. Text (sts. 1, 4): Public domain