

*Are You the One? Pt. 3*  
***Should We Look for Another?***  
*Luke 7: 18-23*

**First Presbyterian Church  
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Gerrit Scott Dawson**

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I wouldn't exactly call it hazing, but there is a rite of initiation for people new to our church and our city. It's called trying to go home via I-10. You take the ramp from North Blvd onto I-110 and head east. But no one has told you that the right two lanes don't take you to south Baton Rouge. Even if you have on GPS, the voice doesn't warn you in time. Too late you realize you have to slide left. But no one will ever let you in. You're being forced onto the Bridge. For the first time, you're 150 feet above the swirling waters of the Mississippi River forced by traffic to speed into an unknown land. Oh sorry, didn't we tell you about the merge? Welcome to town!

It's that moment of panic I want us each to recall. The sickening realization that you're in the wrong lane. Or on the wrong road. That dread that maybe you've made the mistake of the lifetime. Unfortunately, it's a feeling repeated throughout our years. I threw up for two weeks straight after we bought our first house and started renovating it. I'd just have to pull over to the side of the road nauseated at how much money we owed. Was this the right thing to do? It's the feeling when someone we've trusted turns out to be a scoundrel, when a deal turns out to be a scam, when the person you married is not the same person who courted you, when you actually meet the musician you idolized and now feel like a fool. It's a feeling every Christian in this culture is sure to have at one time or another. Am I a numbskull for following Jesus? Is this really the right way to live or I am just a narrow minded, mean spirited, brain dead believer in an outdated religion that insists on an outdated way of life? Am I on the wrong side of history in giving my life to Jesus?

These are the feelings that were swirling through John the Baptist as he heard about the things Jesus was doing and saying. John sent a message to Jesus asking, "Are you the one or should we look for another?" John was afraid that he had backed the wrong Messiah. He feared that he was in the dark, foul prison of King Herod for no purpose. Have I given my life for the right person?

We've been studying Luke 7 together. We're thinking of it as one complete story in five separate acts. It's the story of the way Jesus engaged the powers that

destroy human flourishing. In the first act, Jesus healed the centurion's servant as he combatted the power of disease. In the second act, Jesus confronted the power of death and raised the widow's son. Today Jesus confronts a less visible but even more powerful foe: the power of fear. Fear that we have missed an important turn. Fear that we are going wrong. Fear that we have wasted our lives. Today we will see that the antidote to such fear is *faith*. Faith in Jesus that he is the One we've been waiting for. Faith that enables us to trust him and give our lives to him.

As I thought about it this week, I realized how seldom I ever talk with you about faith itself. Have you noticed that? I don't say much about faith. But it's not because faith isn't important. And it's not because I have forgotten. Biblically, faith does not happen because someone says, "Just believe!" Paul tells us that "faith comes from hearing and hearing through the word of Christ" (Rom. 10: 17). We proclaim Jesus as clearly as we can and the Holy Spirit creates faith in the heart of the hearers to say, "I want him. I want that Jesus. I want to release my life into his hands. I want him to save me and guide me." Pray for the Holy Spirit to open hearts and minds. Proclaim Jesus. Rejoice as people say, "That's my Savior! That's my King." We don't usually have to talk about *our* faith. Rather we talk about our Lord and faith kindles.

That's how Jesus answered John's question. Are you the one or should we look for someone else? Jesus didn't immediately say anything. He turned back to what he was doing. He just acted like Jesus. Luke tells us "In that hour, he healed many people of diseases, plagues and evil spirits, and on many who were blind, he bestowed sight" (7: 21). Jesus answered the question first by just acting like Jesus. Then he made a verbal reply.

"Go and tell John what you have seen and heard:  
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.

Jesus acted. Then he described what he had done in his message to John. Now this is not a random set of acts of kindness, nor any old list of great things for a Messiah to do. Jesus actually used phrases from the book of Isaiah. He wove together prophecies about what the LORD I AM, Israel's God, would do when he came at last to visit his people. He pulled from Isaiah 26: 19, "Your dead shall live;

their bodies shall rise. You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy!” He pulled from Isaiah 35,

Say to those who have an anxious heart,  
“Be strong; fear not!  
Behold, your God  
will come with vengeance,  
with the recompense of God.  
He will come and save you.”  
Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,  
and the ears of the deaf unstopped;  
then shall the lame man leap like a deer,  
and the tongue of the mute sing for joy. (Isaiah 35: 4-5)

And he riffed from Isaiah 61’s prediction of the Messiah the LORD would send. just as he had in the first sermon of his ministry:

The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me,  
because the LORD has anointed me  
to proclaim good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,  
to proclaim freedom for the captives  
and release from darkness for the prisoners... (Isaiah 61: 1; Lk. 4: 18-19)

Jesus acted and then he quoted Scripture to describe his actions *as those of God himself come among his people* in the person of the Christ.

Now, if we consider Luke 7 as one complete story, what we’re looking at today is Act 3. The middle. The midpoint. In classic story structure, Act 3 contains a *reveal*. The main character discovers something that commits him to a certain path. He does something or says something after which there is no return. It will be the point of the whole story. It will be the knowledge we get as the audience that holds the key to what follows. It’s the point where the hero can’t go back, even though he knows this will create conflict. It will lead to a life and death struggle.

Jesus’ great reveal is that following his saving actions, he speaks ancient prophecies of Scripture as being about him all along. He claims to be the point of God’s whole revelation. He is the One and there is no other.

But before he concludes his message to John, he tags on a sentence. It's both a comfort and a warning, a blessing and a rebuke: "And blessed is the one who is not offended by me" (7: 23). At first this seems like an odd thing to say. Who could be offended that Jesus healed the sick, gave sight to the blind and raised the dead? Isn't that all great? God really has visited his people. So why did Jesus add this message?

We could just as rightly translate this sentence as "Blessed is the one who is not scandalized by me." Or even more literally, "Blessed is the one who does not stumble over me." The Greek word there sounds like our word "scandal." It's from the picture of a simple animal trap. You prop a box up on a stick and put some bait further in. The animal knocks into the stick and the box falls down on it. The stick is the stumbling block that gets you stuck. It's the things that scandalize you that makes you wonder if Jesus is really the right one to follow. It's the thing about Jesus that offends or perplexes or even repels people.

For John the Baptist, he was sitting in jail because he had confronted the King with his immorality. He thought he was preparing people for the King's arrival. John knew from his childhood that he would be the herald announcing the Messiah. He would be the advance man clearing the way for the Coming One. He thought he would get to see it all. And he thought that when the Messiah came, *all* the prophecies would be fulfilled. Not only would the sick be made well, but enemies of God's people would be vanquished. Sin would not just be forgiven but justice would be done. Evil would be punished. Not only would the poor receive good news, but all the prisoners, like him, would be released. It wasn't happening like he expected. How can this be the Kingdom of God if Herod is still imprisoning me?

We may well wonder the same. If God is so good, why do good people suffer? If I belong to Jesus, why is my life so hard? But even worse, when people are rejoicing at the great things God has done for them, why am I still sitting in my old circumstances, rotting away? If Jesus is really Lord, why doesn't this depression lift? Why won't my finances work? Why don't I feel more joy? And then the fear slides through us like a cold stripe in the ocean on a summer day. What if I'm following the wrong guy?

I recently heard a man speak of what it meant to lose his father as a child. Even in his grief, he sought comfort in our heavenly Father. But that did not stop the questions. He would hear other Christians giving testimonies. He would see other kids that had Dads to grow up with. And he would wonder, "Is Jesus really

true?" He found great comfort in John the Baptist. What Jesus said to John applied to him: Yes, John, I am the one. But no John, you're not going to get out of the cell. Your place is to go through this. And I am with you. And I want you to trust me. Have faith in me now. Don't stumble here. You're not stuck but sent.

I spoke with a person trying to live with sexual desires that Scripture does not allow us to express. Everything in our culture screams that the only way to fulfillment is to act on such desire. This person declares, "I want to be allowed to choose. I want to determine that I will choose celibacy. I see where these desires lead others, and it is not to life. I want to do something extraordinary. I want to believe that God has put me in this hard place for his glory. That's my faith."

I remember pastor Andrew Brunson in a Turkish prison. He went through a crisis of faith in the beginning. He felt alone and abandoned. He felt his life as a missionary in Turkey had been useless. He wondered if Jesus is the One. Until Christ brought him through to a new level of faith. Until he realized that even if he should spend years in jail, he would know the joy of Jesus. Even if he were to be sentenced to death, eternity would give him hope.

I listen to our high school students express their concerns about going off to college and entering a potentially hostile environment towards Christians. They want to know how to keep faith vibrant. They want to know how to deal winsomely but faithfully with non-Christian friends. They want to be encouraged to keep believing. To keep faithing.

Most times we don't talk about our faith in worship. We talk about Jesus and trust the Holy Spirit to create admiration in us for him. We proclaim Christ and trust the Spirit to create adoration in us for him. And he does. But sometimes we need to hear the encouragement. Blessed, happy, is the one who does not stumble over me. Look, says Jesus, I am the One. I am the One who alone can fill your emptiness. I am the One who alone can cleanse your guilt. I am the One who alone has conquered your death. I am truly the One. But my path for you may well be hard. I have not come the second time to eliminate all evil and ever suffering. Your part may be to live in unfulfilled desire, or in grief, or even in prison.

But don't give up. Don't stumble over Jesus. Trust him. Believe into him. Believe out of your circumstances and into his care. You are not stuck. You are sent. He has not left you. He will not leave you. Keep hoping. Paul the apostle knew his share of suffering, and he wrote to the Romans words that could well have been sent to John the Baptist. "Hope does not put us to shame, because the

love of God has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.” Hope does not fail. Because Jesus does not fail. Whatever cell you may be in, it is not forever. Jesus is forever. He is the one. Trust him with all your heart.