

The title for today's message is: **Questioning Christ**

Luke said: ***And when the men had come to him, they said, "John the Baptist has sent us to you, saying, 'Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?'"***

Grace and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Perfect Plan. That's what a man said to his wife one day. The plan involved new window shades for the windows on their staircase.

It was a plan that was a long time in the making. For months, his wife surfed the internet.

Waiting for the best sale prices and coupons. She looked for days and there they were, she found, at JCPenny.com 50% off plus free shipping.

It was the tri-fecta of savings, the holy grail of online shopping, all right there in one place.

Then later on her husband dragged out his ladder and set it up on the landing where the windows were.

It didn't exactly fit on the landing, but that didn't stop him from trying, I mean, what could possibly go wrong with a step ladder set up on a staircase?

Well, as soon as he climbed the ladder the ladder tipped over and jammed into the wall, and he tumbled down the steps. Not a pretty sight.

There went the great savings his wife made on the window shades, all the savings plus went toward fixing the wall of the staircase.

I mean add on the cost of 1 new ladder, plaster patch, putty knife, 3 boxes of bandages, and a large bottle of Advil, and well, you get the picture.

As you can see, things didn't go according to plan. And just so he didn't forget any time soon, he had some great bruises and scratches to remind him.

Maybe you can relate, especially during this time of the year.

Yet there is a certain hope we have when we unpack Christmas boxes and start decorating our house.

"Maybe this will be the year everything goes exactly right. This year, maybe what we see and hear will match up with the scene we have in our minds!"

But inevitably, as if it's a law of nature, it doesn't. The tree is too big, someone put the turkey in the oven, but never bothered to turn on the oven.

The ornament you can't find, the family member who can't come over, the Pastor who doesn't put the right hymns in the service, the one light that takes out the whole strand!

There are all kinds of ways to mess up Advent and Christmas, it's not even funny. And I'm going to say, "Good."

That's right, "Good!" I can't think of better Advent and Christmas lesson for us to learn than what we learn in those moments.

The moments when our plans don't work out the way we wanted, or when reality doesn't match up with the great thoughts we have about the season.

Again I say "Good." Because Christmas and Advent aren't celebrations of fantasies, or wishes, or even our best laid plans.

They are celebrations of a very real Jesus, born into a very real world. And a Jesus who does his ministry in ways that often surprise us.

Sometimes confusing us, and let's be honest, even frustrating us at times. Just take the strong move today to take God out of Christmas.

You have to ask yourself, how could anyone say "Good" to that. I mean, here it is, only 9 days before the greatest birth ever, the birth of Jesus Christ.

And what do we have to bear, what do we have to mark this joyful season with, the removal of God from Christmas.

Look, someone coined the saying; God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit is the only reason for the season.

Sure its never a good time for anyone to put themselves ahead of God, replacing Him with oneself.

No matter how difficult it may be, the truth is it's "Good" for us to be shaken out of our self-focus, and be confronted by a God.

Look, very rarely do we matched up to how we think things should be, and contrary to popular belief.

God should always work in the lives of His people during the Christmas season as well as during every day and season of the year.

Otherwise what happens, our life is thrown into a hole where we find it hard, if not impossible to climb out

Look, when things like this happens It causes people, many people, non-believers and believers alike.

To wonder and question why God allowed this or that to happen, especially during a part of the year that's supposed to be filled with great joy and love.

Okay, is anyone unhappy with the message for today yet? I know, I'm not supposed to talk this way during this time of year.

Yet, I can't get around it, especially today. It's a lot like John the Baptist when he seems to doubt if Jesus is the Savior, that is to come.

Or, maybe John was confused by the way God worked. Our text tells us that John sent out his disciples to ask Jesus.

“Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?” Clearly John wasn't sure who Jesus was to be, nor what he expected of the Son of God.

Now, people came out of the woodwork to respond to John the Baptist. Thousands repented of their sins, and were baptized.

Then Jesus comes to John to be baptized. And when John saw Jesus coming he said: ***“The Lamb of God who comes to take away the sin of the world.”***

At that time the starter pistol is fired to begin Jesus ministry. Yes, the Long anticipated and long awaited Messiah was fulfilled.

But then something surprising happened. Jesus, the Messiah, doesn't do things the way anyone would have expected God's Chosen one to do.

The first thing he does is disappear into the desert for 40 days. This is important, as Jesus is fasting and facing the temptations of Satan himself.

But whether or not John knew that or not we don't know. Then Jesus starts preaching in his hometown, where the people there tried and kill Him.

There are some wonderful moments too. Jesus begins to heal people, and preach in the Synagogues and soon great crowds are following him.

And just when it looks like Jesus' ministry could really just take off, he goes and chooses some very odd people to be his disciples; fishermen, tax collectors, and the like.

It had to be kind of frustrating for John the Baptist to see all this. Jesus Ministry wasn't just a blazing success (according to earthly standards).

There were ups and downs, and unexpected twists, and odd decisions. And then, to make matters much worse, John finds himself in jail, his only crime, speaking the truth.

We read about this in Mark chapter 6: ***“Herod himself had given orders to have John arrested, and he had him bound and put in prison. He did it because of Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife, whom he had married. For John had been saying to Herod, ‘It is not lawful for you to have your brother’s wife.’”***

A Jewish Historian who lived around this time tells us a little more, he said; ***“Herod, who feared that the great influence John had over the masses might put them into his power and enable him to raise a rebellion... sent him as a prisoner, out of Herod’s suspicious temper, to Man-cher-us,”***

So John goes from preaching to the masses, and seeing thousands of people confess their sins and being baptized, and then seeing the start of the ministry of Jesus the Christ.

It looks like everything was going exactly according to plan! Who knows what John pictured happening with Jesus ministry.

But it's safe to say, as he sits in prison, and knows that Herod's new wife wants him dead, he has some serious questions.

We can hear it in the question he sends a couple of his disciples to ask Jesus. You can hear the hurt, and the heartbreak, and the utter disappointment coming from John.

“Jesus, what is going on here? Jesus it isn’t supposed to be like this! Jesus, I trusted you.”

This is so uncomfortable, isn’t it? If you were going to make up a story about the one who would come and save the world, you wouldn’t include something like this.

But that’s just it. That’s why these questions of John are so important. Because this happened in real life.

And these questions are the kinds of questions we ask sometimes when real life happens to us.

John the Baptist prepared the way for the Messiah, and even though he struggled with deep and vexing questions.

And was uncertain at times of God’s plan, it didn’t stop the Messiah from loving him, and preparing the way for him to be in heaven in the presence of God for all eternity.

So, in the meantime, go ahead and ask. Go ahead and struggle. Go ahead and be honest with God.

His love for you, his plan for you, his forgiveness of your sins won’t change a bit. So have a blessed Advent, and get ready for Christmas.

I hope they are great, but not perfect. Because that perfect celebration will come one day in the presence of Christ himself.

Amen