

Trinity 25-2

Text: Matt. 24:23, 1 John 3:1 (Epiphany 6)

“Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. For there shall arise false Christ’s, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.”

How easy it is to be misled by the world. All that goes on around us, people trying to promote their own agendas, society’s demands, nasty politics in every facet of life. Christ, our beliefs, our Church are all under constant assault. Sometimes its direct, sometimes it’s very subtle. It’s not even Advent yet and the Christmas shopping is in full swing. We certainly know the retailers are anxiously awaiting Christmas.

Where is Christ in all of this? The trials and tribulations never seem to end. The drama never seems to cease. People exclaim, “We have lost sight of what is important!” “What a bitter disappointment all of this is,” they lament. They turn away, shake their heads, tied of the fighting, tied of arguing, tied of the gossiping, heated conversations and accusations. Tied of the demands to meet the expectations of others. Tied of constantly being beat up. Even our faith at times seems hollow. If Jesus was the Christ, then why does all of this happen?

After all, this man was supposed to save all of us. He was to be our salvation and lead us from our worldly oppression. Why are we in the situation we are in? There were many good prophets. Even though he seemed different, look at where he wound up.

I am not sure exactly what the expectations were. After all, there were plenty of miracles, plenty of saving moments, plenty of good stories. Yet, did the message ever get through?

He said He was the son of God. He said He came from the Father. He said that whosoever believes in Him would not perish but have eternal life. Yet how many have died, how many have suffered, how many are still oppressed?

Look at what happened when they put him to death. He was dragged to the courtyard and tied to a post. He knew the sentence of death hung over his head. He had the chance to defend himself but said nothing in his defense. Even though he saw no wrong in him, Pilate still ordered that he be scourged. The crowd had demanded it, “Crucify him, they had shouted!”

"The soldiers went up to Jesus...They put their faces to His... struck Him... spit on Him...They humiliated Him...They put a scarlet robe on Jesus...twisted some thorns into a mock crown...and then pushed it deep into His skull...They forced a wooden staff into His hands...a fake scepter...His tormentors knelt before Him... 'Hail, O King of the Jews! Hail King of the Jews!'

Jesus carried His Own Cross to the site of His crucifixion just outside of the city walls. This was the custom of the day the condemned man, suffering disgrace heaped

upon humiliation tortured and considered to be less than human. His arms were firmly tied to splintered wood. Jesus, critically weakened from the brutal torture, fell several times while attempting to balance the weight as he walked.

The *Processional* to the site of the Skull was led by a full military compliment steered through the crowds by a ranking centurion. He was followed by a Roman soldier who carried a sign that bore the condemned man's name and the charge of his capital crime.

"Pilate had prepared a notice to be fastened to the Cross. It read: JESUS OF NAZARETH-THE KING OF THE JEWS. The sign was written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek.

As he stumbled along the rocky way, The crowd kept shouting, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!'..."

These were the same people He had loved, had healed, had cast out demons from, had fed. These were the same people who listen to His words of peace, love and hope. Now these same people rejected Him and cursed Him-mocked him as he dragged himself to Calvary.

After he arrived at His place of execution, Jesus was nailed to the cross and was lifted into the air, just as Moses had lifted the serpent. When this was completed the sign bearing His name and describing the disposition of His crime, was attached just above His head. *"THIS IS JESUS- THE KING OF THE JEWS."*

Many of the common folk and the members of the ruling class continued to insult Him. *"If you are the King of the Jews save yourself."*

His Mother and His Beloved Disciple John...His Mother's sister...and Mary from Magdala stood near the Cross. We can only imagine their grief and sorrow, their pain.

"Yes, he had been a real disappointment." They said as they turned away and walked from the cross. "He had not freed us from the power of the Romans. He had not lifted the sword, he had not even tried to drive away our oppressors. He didn't do what we wanted him to do. He wasn't at all what we expected"

WHAT WE EXPECTED???

As he hung there, all that was to be-was fulfilled. The blood that ran down the cross and mingled in the dirt from his dying body stained the earth. His torn flesh hung from his body, the pain beyond anything we could imagine. This most agonizing of death, this humiliation, this horrible scene-why?

For us. For here in this moment all that was needed to make us his own was accomplished. All that was required for our salvation was completed, all that was due for our debts was paid.

"Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing." he said as the life flowed from His body.

For two thousand years we have been confronted with the scene of Christ's execution. Yet in all that time, we have too often failed to understand the depth of His sacrifice for us. How distant this has become as we continue to set aside this gift to us in our daily struggles, in our conflicts and in our contempt for each other, in our need to put our own desires first.

Where is Christ in all this? He is there on the cross, with out stretched arms, calling to us to come to Him. Yet we turn from Him, putting our own expectations first. If we truly understood the measure of His suffering, the true meaning behind His sacrifice, the depth of His love, there should not be a single moment in our life that we do not desire to fall on our knees and thank him for his gift to us and embrace the blessing of eternal life in our repentance and efforts to glorify God in everything we do.

If we are seeking self gratification, if we are seeking self fulfillment, if we are looking for something to meet our expectations, then we just don't get it!

The sacrifice of Christ on the cross, His gift to us, His pain and suffering, should touch us so deeply that we should be moved to dedicate ourselves to nothing but focusing our eyes on Christ and striving to do everything we can do to grow in the Spirit in appreciation of what He did for us.

When we fail to do that, we turn away from the foot of the cross, shake our heads in disappointment and tell Him that all He did for us was meaningless.

Advent is almost upon us. It is a time of renewal. It is a time for us to refocus our lives on the meaning of the coming of Christ. It is an opportunity for us to set aside everything about us, and to make everything about Him. To be less concerned about what society has done with the celebration of His coming and more concerned with where Christ is in our lives. We need ask ourselves if we are disappointing Him in anything we do.

“Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew Him not. Beloved now, we are the sons of God...” Are we?

AMEN