

Sermon: 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Advent

Text: Luke 7:18-28 Theme: Report what you have seen and heard.

Goal: To share the Good News of Jesus, being sure that He is the Messiah sent by God to be our Savior.

Dear Friends,

Introduction: Our Watchword for this year was “Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how He has had mercy on you.” We have worked on it especially during the first half of the year) and we have a new Watchword for 2013. But this doesn't mean that our previous Watchword is not valid anymore and that we will stop sharing the Good News with our family and friends. This is a permanent task and privilege of the Christians. Again and again the Bible reminds us to “go and tell”. I don't know how many of you have really put the Watchword into practice during 2012. But, of course, a *“holy inquietude”* fills our heart when we think about our beloved ones who are not in good fellowship with God. We lift them up in prayer to God and we look for opportunities to invite them and to tell them how good it is for us to be in fellowship with God and to enjoy His love and His peace. During Christmas time, our wishes and prayers are that God's message of the Holy Child born in Bethlehem reaches the hearts of the unbelievers and of those who have gone astray, shining in them the light of forgiveness and hope that only Jesus can give.

Our Gospel is about John the Baptist and his relationship with Jesus as His forerunner. The past two Sundays this relationship was highlighted as well. I picked one detail of the text related to our Watchword and we will see how we can apply it to our life as Jesus' witnesses: “Go back and report what you have seen and heard.”

I – The question Questions and doubts always try to destabilize our faith. We have to be careful. Even John the Baptist, who had announced in a loud and clear voice that Jesus was “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” and who had baptized Jesus, hearing the voice of God from heaven and seeing the Holy Spirit coming upon Jesus like a dove, even John had doubts. John was put in prison by King Herod, for having accused Herod to be an adulterer as the king took the wife of his own brother. From the prison, John sent two of his disciples to ask Jesus, “Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?”

Maybe John was wondering why he was put in prison while Jesus was beginning His ministry. Some Bible Commentaries say that the doubts were not of John, but of his disciples. Therefore John sent them to Jesus to confirm their faith. Anyway, the question is there: “Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?”

Our congregation was given the name “St. Thomas” to allow people to ask questions, as the disciple Thomas used to have lots of questions and doubts. We have the right to raise questions; not just to raise some questions, but to receive the answer from the Bible and to be more convinced about our faith.

II – The signs Jesus didn’t answer the question immediately. Instead, He performed several miracles. Why didn’t Jesus answer their question soon? Because deeds and examples speak louder than words. - Can we learn something from this? Sometimes we don’t know what to say to someone about our Christian faith, how to begin an evangelistic talk. Be sure that your life speaks louder than your voice. If you live a Christian life, being faithful to God in your church, in your job and in your family life, your faith will shine and give a good testimony.

Let's imagine if Jesus had answered the question soon, without performing any miracles. The disciples would have gone back to John, would have given the answer, and John would say: *Yeah, but what proof do you have that Jesus is really the Messiah?*

The deeds and miracles the disciples saw were clear signs of the Messiah. Several texts in the Old Testament point to the days of the Messiah as being days of relief and help from above. Jesus quoted one of these passages in Isaiah 61:1, 2 when He preached at the synagogue at Nazareth, applying it to Himself. We read in Luke 4:18-21: Jesus began to read: “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because He has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.” Then... He began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

“To preach the Good News to the poor” was the goal of the signs and miracles. Jesus didn't want to help people only bodily. He used to call the attention of the people by His miracles and then He preached them the Good News of God: His love, His call to repentance, His forgiveness, His new life offered to all by faith in Jesus.

### III – The follow up

After seeing the miracles and hearing the preaching of Jesus, He sent the two disciples back to John the Baptist: “Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard.”

“Go back and report what you have seen and heard.” When we go back from our Service, what do our children, relatives and friends hear about the service? Do they hear nothing but criticisms about the pastor, about some members? Watch out: If we do so, other people will never be convinced to follow our faith and to come to our church. But if we report the good things that we have seen and heard, some details of the message that touched my hearth, a hymn that like, a hug that gave me some love, this will awake curiosity in the people and maybe they will

be encouraged to come with us to know more about our God and to worship Him as well.

If you have children in the Sunday School, don't miss the opportunity to ask them about the Bible Story they have just learnt, to sing some carols they sang, to review the Memory Verse they practiced. The children like to "report what they have seen and heard". If they report something not so good or troublesome, try to help them to understand what happened and to forgive. - We adults shall do the same.

Conclusion: Christmas time, with all the activities we have, is a good time to report to others what is happening: The Christmas Play, the Santa's Shoe Box, the visit to the Congolese, the Christmas Carols, the special decoration, the Candlelight Service, the schedule we have... Go back home and report, share, invite. God can do miracles through our witness.

From the Christmas Story, we have the good example of the shepherd and how they reported about what they have seen and heard. We read in Luke 2:17-20: "When the (shepherds) had seen him (Jesus), they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them... The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told."

Don't miss the opportunity to invite someone to our Advent/Christmas services. People are usually more open to look for a church just for Christmas. Maybe this is the opportunity that God will use to touch their hearts.

May God bless us as we "go back and report what we have seen and heard" about God's love and His power and grace through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.