**Sermon Text**: Luke 7:18-28

**Occasion**: Third Sunday of Advent, 10 Dec 2024

**What Did You Come to See?**

Grace, mercy and peace be to you in the name of God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

What did you come here to see? Jesus asks a similar question to those who once came to witness John the Baptist. What did they go out to see? They went to John the Baptist to see a prophet. They went to hear the Word of God and the promise of God fulfilled. For when they went to see John, they came in the hopes that they might witness the Messiah. If there was a possibility of God’s promised salvation—the promise whom they could personally meet and see, then those people wanted to come. This is of course what we should want. We wish to meet Christ, the promised Saviour, and live in his name. We wish to hear him speak comfort to our fearful hearts and healing to our failing flesh.

But let me ask the question again: what did *you* come here to see? I’m asking *you*—yes you who are here. What did you come into this worship service today to witness and experience? What is it that you wish to see here, right before you as you sit in your pew?

If you came here today to witness a man in soft clothing prance about a church and hand out snacks at the altar rail, you will be sorely disappointed. There will be no show like that here. I may wear white robes to conduct the service and offer the medicine of immortality at the communion rail, but there will be no service here purely to feed the eyes and mouth while leaving the soul hungry. Sure, some churches may place the emphasis on appearances, wearing white robes to emphasize importance over parishioners or promising only bread and grape juice in communion, not the true presence of Christ. But that is not why I am here. I am here to preach Christ’s words of eternal life and administer his body and blood to those in common communion. If you are here for some other reason—perhaps a show and some finger foods—then this is not the service for you. You are looking for Sunday morning entertainment instead. You would not be looking for God’s grace and His love offered among you right here in this place.

So, I ask you again: what did you come here to see? If it is anything other than God’s grace made manifest in Christ Jesus our Lord, then you came here for the wrong reason. But regardless of if you came here for a wrong reason, that does not mean you can’t stay for the right reason. There is a right reason for being here which is to receive the grace of Christ.

We are gathered in the name of Christ Jesus in the remembrance of our baptisms that we may continue to receive the promises made in Christ’s name. Here we are gathered to hear what Christ has done for us by being born on Christmas day, dying on the cross, rising from the dead, and ascending into heaven to return for the final judgment. These words give us more than a history lesson. These words actively give you what Christ has done in those actions.

You have come here for and receive God’s presence with you. Christ was born in human flesh to dwell among us (John 1:14), and now you have the grace and truth of God here since He dwells wherever two or more are gathered in His name (Matt 18:19-20). You have come here and receive the forgiveness of sins through faith. Christ went to the cross to offer up his body and blood as a sacrifice for the wrongs we have committed and have yet to commit (Heb 10:10). You have come here and live in the resurrection of Jesus. For as you were baptized into Christ Jesus you were baptized into his death to sin once for all; and as you rose above the waters, so you rose above sin and death into newness of life (Rom 6:3-4). And as you have risen into eternal life so too will your flesh arise from the grave on the Last Day. You have the promise that you will arise to join God in heavenly places. For as Christ rose from this earth to meet the Father in heaven, so will you walk through the gates of the kingdom to come to dwell in the heaven of the new earth (Rev 21:1-6).

So, what did you come here to hear? Was it not this Gospel message of hope? Was it not the comfort of our Lord Jesus as it comes to you through his words? For this is the purpose of this worship service. The worship service is never a mere show. It is not a mere performance, a song and dance for entertainment. Our worship is wholly concerned with receiving God in our midst and with Him giving to us all that which He has promised. We have come here to taste and see that the Lord is good.

Our Lord gives us His own body and blood in, with, and under bread and wine that we may taste his body and drink his blood for our salvation. The very same body and blood that was offered up and shed at the cross sits in your hands and passes past your lips at the communion rail. What did you come here to taste? It is not mere bread and wine you come to taste (or hope to taste in the case of anyone yet to be confirmed). You have come here to taste salvation and receive Christ in your life.

The Lord’s Supper is meant not only to offer salvation but also to encourage you in the salvation which you receive here. For why do we receive the Supper? As Christ says, this is what we eat and drink for the forgiveness of sins (Matt 26:28). We eat and drink in the acknowledgement that we are sinners in the need of help. And we are forgiven here, receiving his help. Now cleansed from sin, we are here that we may start afresh and live according to our sinlessness which was just received. The Supper is meant to give us direction and strength to live. We are meant to rise up from the Supper and depart in peace as God’s servants to serve those in this world. We see this also in the community of the Supper.

For who did we come here to see besides our Lord? We came to see one another. We came to commune with our Lord and hold communion with the community of faith. If we serve God, then we must serve one another. We cannot love God and receive His love here in His midst only to neglect those whom He loves around us. If you do not love your brother or sister in the faith, then you cannot love God faithfully (1 Jn 4:20). There is no reason why we should neglect to meet with each other to encourage each other to love and good works if Christ himself meets with us to give us the same encouragement in this world (Heb 10:24-25).

The busy nature of the Christmas season may wish to intrude on our time spent with one another at church, fleeing from fellowship by exiting the building immediately as the service ends. But we should not neglect meeting with one another. God has knit us together into the fabric of His Church that we might not only worship together but have fellowship with one another and serve His people as one body. We can spare some moments to ask how our fellow worshippers are doing and hear about anything we can pray about for them. For we did not come here to see a show where we sit next to strangers in padded seats while actors and singers perform. Such a situation would not find words spoken between you and your neighbour except, “Excuse me” or “I believe you are in my seat”. Those are the words of people who do not know each other nor have been baptized into one body. There is no fellowship there—not even with the people on stage. But here, outside of mere performance—outside of mere entertainment, we are fellow participants in Christ’s body, blood, and word. We are fellow worshippers which means we are also brothers and sisters one to another. And as the family of God, it is good to check in now and again and see how your family is doing.

For what did you come here to see? You in the pew, my fellow worshipper and sibling in Christ—what did *you* come here to see? Was it not God’s grace made manifest around you? And what to you come here to hear? Was it not the precious words of Christ for your salvation and the salvation of all those present? And what did you come here to taste? Was it not the very forgiveness of sins in the body and blood of Christ? Yes, I tell you, and more than all this: for we have come here to witness Christ himself. We might think he is hidden from our eyes and ears and mouth but he isn’t. He is truly present and he comes to you while you are here. That is what our worship is all about.

This can’t just be about entertainment, because that’s not what God offers in the divine service. Nor is this about having a meal that just reminisces about Jesus’ life. Nor is this the place where you bargain with God, as if you can offer Him anything to undo the wrongs you have done. This is hallowed ground for God is present here. You are holy people for God makes you holy. And these are sacred confessions, songs, and actions because they are done in the name of Christ for the good of us, his people. We are here because Christ is here and he makes us holy like himself (1 Jn 3:3). Amen.

The peace that surpasses all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.