

Things Are Not Always What They Seem

- ✧ **The Messiah came to pray. (v.12)**
- ✧ **The Messiah came to call sinners. (vv.14-16)**
- ✧ **The Messiah still comes through His apostles. (v.13)**

In the name of Jesus, our Advent Lord and Savior, dear joyful disciples:

Type the theme of this sermon into Google, and you get about 249,000,000 hits. One site credited a Roman author Phaedrus (c. 15 BC – c. 50 AD), in the time of Christ. Hundreds of images pop up to picture **Things Are Not Always What They Seem**. Wouldn't you think people would realize you can't always trust what you see? Just because you believe it, does not make it true. Just because you deny it, does not make it false. People are sure their god will accept them if they try hard enough; but that's not true about the one true God. He is holy. People fear their god will condemn them if they're too bad; but that's not true about the one true God. The LORD is kind and gracious, "*full of compassion and mercy.*" (James 5:11)

Think how Isaiah (35:1-10) in our First Lesson sees the *feeble, blind, deaf and lame*; the hopeless *wilderness*; the dead, dry *desert*. God sees opportunities to give strength, sight, hearing and deer-like leaping, *streams in the wilderness* and *a Highway of holiness for our God*. James (5:7-11) in our Second Lesson focuses on the farmer. How patiently he waits for bare ground to turn to a fertile field. Likewise, we need to wait patiently for the righteous Judge to open the door and step inside our world. Christ will come for His final Advent. Jesus' cousin John the Baptist in our Gospel (Matthew 11:2-11) was confused that **Things Are Not Always What They Seem**. After all his hard work to prepare people for Jesus' coming, John was in prison. Could Jesus really be the Messiah? "Or should we look for someone else?"

✧ **The Messiah came to pray. (v.12)**

Friends and family were always sure they knew what Jesus should be doing. Healing the sick. Making a name for himself. Fighting off the Romans and feeding the hungry. Everyone had an agenda that seemed just right for Jesus – if he were the promised **Messiah** they imagined. Are we so different? We want Jesus to pay our bills even if we manage our money poorly. We want Jesus to bless us even if we fail to come to His house for His blessing, or to worship Him, or to say our prayers. We want Jesus to feel good about us even though we do so little good for him. Our lives are crayon pictures the way we draw them, but we want awards from God as if we're producing Picassos. That's how it seems to us! But **Things Are Not Always What They Seem**.

How many times do we read in the Gospel accounts: They could not find Jesus! His own parents searched three days before they found Him, of all places, at church – in the temple. That's where people hear God's Word, receive His blessing, and pray. Sometimes His disciples looked in the morning, but He was gone! Off by Himself. What was Jesus doing? He was not worrying or scheming to beat back His radical religious and political enemies. "*Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray. He spent the night praying to God.*" A thousand years earlier through His ancestor David, Jesus the coming Christ said, "*I am a man of prayer.*" (Psalm 109:4) God had big plans for Jesus. **The Messiah came to pray.**

Jesus prayed for God to guard and keep you in His High Priestly Prayer. To make your life productive as branches on the Vine, sanctified by His Word of truth. (John 15; 17) And you are afraid God is too busy? God is infinite knowledge; Jesus can process all the prayers of everyone all at once. God is infinite love; Jesus gives you 100% while He gives me the same. God is infinite power; nothing is too hard for Him. **Things Are Not Always What They Seem**. Jesus is never too busy to pray – or to listen.

✧ **The Messiah came to call sinners. (vv.14-16)**

Are you afraid God is too angry to hear your prayers? Listen to Jesus who washed your sins away with His blood. He commands you to pray. He promises God will give you everything you ask in His Name according to His will. That's great, because God will only give what's good for you eternally.

Things Are Not Always What They Seem because **The Messiah** did not come to call super religious priests and self-righteous Pharisees. Jesus came to fulfill the promises of God. **Things Are Not Always What They Seem.** God hides His glory under the cross. Don't trust the lying snake from hell who says we command our own destiny; God wants us to trust His Word. Don't think you can come to God on your own or make yourself right with God if you try hard enough. Jesus says, "**No one comes to the Father except through me.**" (John 14:6) And don't despair when things seem hopeless. Again and again the Psalmist asks himself: "**Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me?**" Each time he answers: "**Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.**" (Psalm 42:5 NIV84) **My Savior and my God** are mine, a real sinner. You too. **The Messiah came to call sinners.**

After praying all night, Jesus was ready to announce His decision. "**When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them....**" Did you catch their names? Remember what kind of men they were? There was **Simon Peter** – who asked Jesus to leave him alone, demanded Jesus not die on the cross, said Jesus should not wash his feet, and swore he did not know Jesus. Brothers **James** and **John** asked Jesus to destroy a whole village for not welcoming Him. They asked for the best places in heaven for themselves. **Matthew** was known as a publicly sponsored cheat and extortionist – tax collectors back then. "**Doubting Thomas**" is best known for gross demands, refusing to believe in Jesus' resurrection. Which was worse, **Judas Iscariot who became a traitor**? Or all the disciples who ran away when Jesus needed them the most? If you're self-righteous, God wants to humble you to face the truth of your sin and wretchedness. If you're convicted, you're welcome here. **Things Are Not Always What They Seem. The Messiah came to call sinners.**

✧ **The Messiah still comes through His apostles. (v.13)**

After He **called his disciples to him**, Jesus **chose twelve of them, whom he designated apostles.** He would send them out with full authority to teach and preach His Word. He would send them His Holy Spirit to remind them even decades later of everything He said. They would write down each word as the Holy Spirit breathed into them His exact words and expressions. **The Messiah still comes through His apostles** so everyone can know the truth – not just opinions, but what is truly right in the sight of God.

Every one of Jesus' Twelve **apostles**, including Matthias, elected to replace Judas (Acts 1:23-26), agrees with what the Holy Spirit inspired the Apostle Paul to write. **Things Are Not Always What They Seem!** Your good works contribute nothing to your salvation. Your feelings cannot make you right with God. Your church has no power of its own to take your sins away, but we are commanded to announce God's forgiveness. As He says through Paul: "**By grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.**" (Ephesians 2:8–10 NIV84) God makes you like a well tuned guitar for His fingers to play beautiful music.

Time is running out, not just for this sermon! **The Messiah** who came the first time to suffer and die for all sin, will not delay to come again in glory to judge the living and the dead. He wants you ready for His Second, final Advent. That's why **The Messiah still comes through His apostles** today. They all call us to examine our ways: Do you show love to God by loving your neighbor? Are your offerings of time and talent truly thankful? Do you support God's Gospel mission with your heart in the offering plate? Do you study God's Word eagerly? Praise God's Name regularly? Or are you trying to drive like a city boy on a country road, jerking around the corners? Keep your eyes down the road to eternity and let Jesus drive. He wants to keep you in His tender loving care until He comes to take you home. Amen.

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