**Jesus and John the Baptist**

**The Word**

Read together Luke 7:18-23

**The Big Idea**

Even people as spiritually mature as John the Baptist have their doubts at times due to the unexpected ways Jesus brings his kingdom and the personal disappointments of life. Jesus does not shame us for our doubts but rather encourages us to bring our doubts honestly as we continue to press in to him in faith.

**Questions for Discussion**

1. This “Encounters with Jesus” series is all about seeing our Lord more clearly: his heart, his values, and his mission. What’s one thing you see more clearly in Jesus from this encounter?

2. What role has doubt played in your own journey of faith?

3. As you consider your life with Jesus today, what issues (theological or personal) continue to be a source of doubt and/or wrestling for you? To use the language of Sunday’s sermon, what issues continue to “trip you up?”

4. Sunday’s message concluded with the call to doubt well. What struck you most about that idea, and what would you want to add to the idea of doubting well?

**Digging Deeper**

Read the story of “Doubting Thomas” in John 20:24-30. Consider the words of Jesus to Thomas in that story. What do we learn about the nature of faith from that encounter?

**Sermon Outline**

I. Consider the significance of John the Baptist’s question

A. Are you the one who is to come or should we expect someone else? (v. 19)

B. This is John the Baptist: miraculous birth, filled with the Spirit in the womb, the great forerunner of the Christ, and even he is doubting who Jesus is!

C. Clearly who Jesus is or what he is doing (or not doing) is so unexpected that even John is having his doubts

II. The role of doubt in the Christian life

A. It is often an unspoken reality in church communities.

B. For some of us, doubt was never given any room in our upbringings and we learned to keep our questions to ourselves.

C. For many of us, doubt is like a house guest: It comes in from time to time often unexpected and unwelcome, sometimes staying for a short while, sometimes staying longer.

III. There were probably two sources of John’s doubts

A. Theological/philosophical

1. John had an expectation that the Messiah would come and clean house in Israel, saving the faithful and judging the unfaithful in a clearer and more explicit way (see his words in Luke 3:9, 16-17)

2. Jesus’ miracles up in Galilee don’t fit with his expectations. Jesus’ ministry hasn’t changed any of the fundamental realities of the day: Rome is still in charge and a corrupt religious leadership remains intact.

B. Personal/Experiential

1. After years of faithful ministry for God, John is now stuck in prison and Jesus doesn’t seem to be doing anything about that.

2. Consider the disappointing trajectory of John’s life and ministry

a. Miraculous birth

b. Powerful and popular ministry

c. The high point: Christ is publicly revealed at his baptism by John

d. A waning ministry (he must increase, I must decrease)

e. Imprisonment

f. Death by beheading

3. After months alone in a dark prison cell, disappointment, questions, and wrestlings must have kicked in for John.

IV. We often experience the same sources of doubt in our own lives

A. Theological/philosophical

1. Science: One of the most common modern doubts about Jesus involves harmonizing the findings of modern science with a biblical worldview (age of the earth, evolution, miracles, resurrection, angels and demons, etc.)

2. Contemporary moral sensibilities: Another common challenge for people is how to harmonize our culture of expressive individualism with the ethics of scripture as well as historical and theological realities found in the Bible (gender and sexuality, marriage, women’s roles, slavery, judgment, the exclusivity of Christ’s claims, hell, etc.)

B. Personal/experiential

1. Life hasn’t gone the way we had hoped and we’re left with profound disappointments and questions about God’s goodness or even existence

2. We all have a prosperity gospel theologian inside of us that thinks if we are faithful to God he will bless our lives circumstantially in some ways, and when that expectations isn’t met we can become very disillusioned.

3. The Psalms regularly convey this kind of doubt/disappointment with God

V. Jesus’ response to John

1. He does not chastise or shame John for his question but rather affirms him as a great prophet (v. 24-28)

2. He simply points to the ministry he is doing as if to say, “my ministry speaks for itself.” He frames his ministry in the language of Isaiah which John would recognize.

3. He encourages John, “Don’t stumble on account of me.”

a. Word picture: Imagine you are walking a path and there is a stone in front of you (represents Jesus). It’s easy to get tripped up on this stone, to stumble, to even fall away.

b. Jesus is acknowledging, “I know I’m not what you expected. There’s lots about me to get tripped up on. But keep on going, don’t fall away, get back up and keep trusting. I am the Messiah.”

VI. Doubting Well

1. Doubt in community

a. John’s isolation probably led to some of his doubts.

b. Don’t let your doubts isolate you from community, but share your doubts honestly with trusted people and stay connected.

2. Doubt faithfully

a. Don’t let your doubts become an excuse to live however you want. People often use the vagueness of their beliefs as license to live how they want.

b. Our actions and our beliefs are deeply connected. If we start living disobediently, we tend to form beliefs that justify our actions.

3. Doubt proactively

a. Don’t just linger indefinitely in seasons of gray and doubt. Pursue the issues faithfully.

b. Many of us have very busy lives and we can’t dedicate tons of time every day to these doubts, so decide what an appropriate amount of regular time would be given your other responsibilities, and give yourself to that