

Grace and Peace to you from our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ!

Have you ever had some rough times? Have you ever been down and out? Have you ever had some event or series of happenings that have just left you crushed?

Have you been a church goer all your life and then felt “blah about going” or had one of those terrible life moments and now you were mad at God or feeling left out of the hope? Maybe then, you felt as if the faith was useless and wanted to never come back?

Arissa found herself in one of those desperate situations too. Her father was very ill and on death’s doorstep. Her academic pursuits in America were so tough and some of her key friends were not there for her.

Well, dear brothers and sisters in Christ and seeking friends, that is just where we find a true Bible and hero of the faith in our sermon text today from Matthew 11:1-7.

Yes, no other than that famous spiritual prophet and faithful servant of God, John the Baptist. He was in a very dire and tough situation and now was searching for Christ’s help and guidance and restored Hope!

Jesus the Christ, our Savior, our God, our Deliverer was there to help comfort, John the Baptist and He is still reaching out today

Here are those verses from our text in Matthew;

Jesus and John the Baptist

11 After Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in the towns of Galilee.^[a]

² When John, who was in prison, heard about the deeds of the Messiah, he sent his disciples ³ to ask him, “Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?”

⁴ Jesus replied, “Go back and report to John what you hear and see: ⁵ The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy^[b] are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. ⁶ Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me.”

⁷ As John's disciples were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swayed by the wind?"

In this verse we can relate to John the Baptist and like him, find renewed Hope, Joy, and Inspiration in our lives and faith.

Jesus is our ultimate and most epic source of Joy, Life, Hope, Peace, and Guidance.

Arisa grew up in a divided home. Her family life was a combination of divided ideas, love, arguments, divided attentions, care, siblings, and some normal activities, and a drive to do well in her education.

Her mom was a practicing Buddhist and became more and more devout over time. She was very passionate about instilling her increasing Buddhist beliefs in her kids. She would even take her kids to the Buddhist temple to learn.

Her Dad was a Christian, and as life went on he was blessed to have a growing passion for Jesus Christ. He would take them to a church as often as he could. The Christian faith is not in the majority in Taiwan. There are churches, but Christians are in the minority there. Arissa's Dad, tried to get them to Sunday school programs as often as he could especially when it didn't conflict with his work schedule.

Arisa grew up with these ideas and conflicts. She throughout her life went to both religions ceremonies, services, and events. Naturally, as she grew older she started to question all that she was being taught and bombarded with.

The tension grew between her mom and dad. As each changed and grew deeper in their faiths, they would "fight" for the kids. This made things tough on Arissa and she really struggled at times.

Family gatherings would be tough. Her mom's family was all Buddhist. Her Dad's was mostly Buddhist, but a few Christians.

Verse 2 in our text says, "² When John, who was in prison, heard about the deeds of the Messiah, he sent his disciples ³ to ask him, 'Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?'"

John the Baptist had been imprisoned by Herod. John was out in the desert preaching God's Word, Baptized Jesus, called for repentance, saw many people turn to the faith was now in a horrible circumstance. Prisons were different than now. Conditions were awful, nasty, and Herod who imprisoned him hated him. It was a very dire and miserable condition we find John.

We might think, that this question is surprising to ask. Afterall, he did baptize Jesus, saw the heavens open, and all those other amazing Jesus moments. However, he was now in a fear for his life and things were now very very desperate.

Maybe, similar to us. Maybe we have gone to church all our lives and now things just are not making sense. Things seem very tough, and our day to day existence seems extremely hard or worse yet, boring and mundane. Maybe we have been a volunteer forever in your church, and no one comes to anything and you are depressed.

Or maybe you have encountered some really difficult things in your life and you thought, that by going to church this would all be ok, but it is not and you are struggling. John the Baptist was struggling too. He was in an awful and frightening situation after serving God so passionately.

He tells his Disciples to find Jesus, and for reassurance, re-confirming, and probably just a burst of encouragement and reminder of all that was good and hopeful. He basically asks Jesus, are you the Messiah? Are you the one to come? Are you really the one who we should hold our hope in?

Arisa went through bouts of hating religion and wanting to completely rebel against both parents and being a complete anti-religion atheist and thinking about being a devout follower of both.

She loved her parents and tried very hard to be a good daughter. The tension was tough in her home. Her brother chose the atheist path. Her sister was similar to her. She enjoyed English classes, geography, and literature. She always liked the idea of traveling.

Arisa did well in school and found it to be a release from home. She studied all the time and spent a lot of extra time in school studying and extra classes when she could. She was accepted into a prestigious university and wanted to be a teacher. She was excited to move into a dorm and live at the university. She did well in her studies and she enjoyed college.

She enjoyed being at college more and more and she liked being at home less. She found herself, so emerged in studies that she didn't have time for family or religion.

She graduate with honors and was very excited. However, she wanted more education and to really accelerate her career opportunities she wanted to get a Master's degree. She found out that there was an agreement with an American university where her home university students could go and study and continue their education in exchange.

John's disciples find Jesus and they question him. Jesus response is; ⁴ Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: ⁵ The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy^[b] are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. ⁶ Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me."

Jesus proclaims His Good News. Here he answers John by saying, see all the wonders that are happening, see all the miracles. See all the amazing things that is being done in Jesus' name and all the people that are being changed and helped.

Here Jesus confirms that He is that Messiah. The one that is our Savior. That He is the one to hold our hope in. John receives his answer and confirmation. In his event of doom, he finds his Hope. Jesus is our Savior.

When all else has crashed, broken, fallen apart, and exploded all over us. Christ's promise of restoration, hope, forgiveness, life eternal, and ultimate redemption is true and to be believed in.

Life of this earth will have its hurts, brokenness, and horrible situations. But, in Christ we spiritually and eternally can have our Hope and Faith in Him. He overcomes all this and in Him, we can get through all these difficulties.

Arissa came to Kent State to study for a Masters in Teaching English as a Second Language, TESL. She was very excited. Her first time out of Asia! She was excited to practice her English and go to America.

When she arrived, she quickly noticed that everyone in America spoke English so fast. She had a hard time adjusting to the language, culture, different foods, and spread out buildings. Public transportation was a little sparse and difficult to maneuver.

She lived in an apartment with another international student. They were randomly matched together in an university apartment. But, they quickly discovered they had different interests, lifestyles, different activities they wanted to do, and weren't the most compatible. There was only a few items of furniture too, not much comfort.

It was a tough beginning for Arissa. When she came to America. She was so excited for the experience, the opportunity to study, and the escape of traveling. It was very tough emotionally to have this rough beginning.

She hadn't thought much about religion when she left Taiwan. However, she heard about a furniture fair from one of her classmates. She didn't know who was sponsoring it, but she knew that she would love to have a couch and comfy chair, oh and a nice frying pan.

At the furniture fair she met some nice Americans. She was able to find and get delivered to her apartment, a couch, chair, and a nice frying pan.

She was also invited to go on a trip to Niagara Falls. She had seen pictures of Niagara Falls in her classes and had dreamed of going some day. She signed up for the day trip. Things were starting to get better for her.

She had a wonderful trip to Niagara Falls. She met some new friends, had some great experiences, took many great photos, and even on the way back had some delicious food. On the trip she was invited to a Bible study at Luther House. At first she didn't know if she wanted to go, but she had such a nice time with her new friends and they also had given her furniture.

She went to Bible study, her friends were there. She felt peace and comfort at the Bible study. She was now feeling joy, her loneliness was gone, she had some

friends in America! The more she studied about Jesus and heard about His Good News, the more peace and comfort she was having.

Then after her first year of Graduate studies. Her Dad in Taiwan was diagnosed with a serious heart condition. She was in terror. She was over 10,000 miles from home, yet her Dad was very ill. It was a terrible situation for her, all that worry and anxiety.

She hadn't been home in over a year and a half. She went home over Christmas break to see her Dad. It was so emotionally draining to see her Dad in the hospital. Her mom would do Buddhist prayers and rituals to try to help. Her Dad was happy to hear of Arissa's involvement in the campus ministry.

Her mom took it very badly and was extremely disappointed in her and angry. IT was tough being at home. She was home for about a month during the break. Her Dad was in and out of the hospital. Arissa was really sad. She almost couldn't go back her studies in America, but her parents urged her to continue her studies. Her Dad encouraged her in her faith and her studies and hoped that she could go on and finish.

She started her next semester in January, the spring semester. After a few weeks, she called me frantic and upset about her Dad. He was back in the hospital. She was very emotional. We read Scripture and prayed together. She attended Bible study regularly now and found a lot of comfort in Christ's message.

We met again a few weeks later, as her Dad had regone back in to the hospital. Then one evening, about 3am, she frantically called me and said that her Dad had died.

She flew home on a flight she could find the quickest. It was a very sad and rushed trip. It was almost overwhelming and crushing.

She said her newly strengthened faith and Christ's encouragement was the only thing that could help her get through this disaster. She found Hope in Christ. In Christ's Good News and His promise of eternal life she found her guidance.

She said that before, without her renewed and actual faith in Christ, she would have have been able to get through this life.

Arisa eventually finished her semester. And then after her Graduation, she went back to Taiwan. Praise the Lord we have a new sister in Christ, as she got baptized. She wanted to get baptized at her home so she could witness to her family and have them watch.

And now let the Peace of Christ bless