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Zion Lutheran Church, Youngstown, Ohio

Weekend of Sunday, January 19, 2020
Combined Worship with New Beginnings Outreach Ministry
2nd Sunday after Epiphany/Lectionary 2/Proper X/Year A
First Reading: Isaiah 49:1-7
Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 1:1-9
Gospel Reading: John 1:29-42
Sermon Title: “We Belong Together”

Theme

John the Baptist’s witness to Jesus initiates a chain of testimony as his disciples begin to share with others what they have found.

Text

²⁹[John the Baptist] saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! ³⁰This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.’ ³¹I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel.” ³²And John testified, “I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. ³³I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ ³⁴And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God.”

³⁵The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, ³⁶and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, “Look, here is the Lamb of God!” ³⁷The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. ³⁸When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, “What are you looking for?” They said to him, “Rabbi” (which translated means Teacher), “where are you staying?” ³⁹He said to them, “Come and see.” They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o’clock in the afternoon. ⁴⁰One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. ⁴¹He first found his brother Simon and said to him, “We have found the Messiah” (which is translated Anointed). ⁴²He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, “You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas” (which is translated Peter).

Sermon

A follow-up to the last time we got together.

You may recall that I showed you my report from Ancestry DNA that indicated that I was not as German as I thought. In fact I was 56% Great British and only 12% West European which would cover any German heritage I had.

Well, I don't know how this stuff works but, true story, Ancestry sent me an update and now I am 50% Germanic European and only 38% Great British. I feel better about that and about myself. For the last year I had been trying to acquire a taste for tea and crumpets, but now I feel good about my return to beer and bratwurst. My genetic identity and who I always thought I was are back in sync.

Though I agree, it is a stretch, this information is pertinent to the Gospel Reading that I read to you a moment ago. The reading comes from the first chapter of John's Gospel. The only thing that has happened in John's Gospel up to this point is John the Baptist came onto the scene and began his ministry of baptizing folks for the preparation of the coming of the Messiah and then the baptism of Jesus.

Contextually, the Gospel Reading for today happened the very next day. John saw Jesus off in the distance and blurted out at the top of his lungs so that all would know, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" 'He is the one from above that we have been waiting for!' And then he went on to further identify him by giving testimony to the details of his baptism of Jesus the day before. 'The Spirit descended on him like a dove and remained on him.' John wanted everyone to know that God the Father identified Jesus as Messiah, that forgiveness of sins has come through him, and now he was simply passing that good news on.

John's enthusiasm for this new news didn't diminish after the first day. As you heard, in verse 35 and following, the next day John saw Jesus again and exclaimed the same thing, "Look, here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" And by this time folks were noticing, and two of John's disciples were among those who took notice, and left John and began to follow Jesus. We don't often think of John having disciples but he did. John was an important person on the scene at that time and it was pretty clear to him and many others that his

ministry was to be the forerunner of the Messiah, so if one wanted to be among the first to know who Messiah was, become a follower of John.

And John was not upset about his disciples abandoning him and following Jesus. That is how it was supposed to be. Knowing that he had a role in the greatest event in human history he said,

John 3:29b-30 "My joy has been fulfilled. ³⁰He must increase, but I must decrease."

Later that second day, one of John's disciples who heard John exclaim that Jesus was the real deal and left him to follow Jesus, was named Andrew. And Andrew went to his brother, a man by the name of Simon Peter and said, "We have found the Messiah," and Jesus' small motley crew of followers began to take shape.

I used the expression *motley crew* a moment ago because if we take a deeper look at those Jesus chose to include, we would find that

- one was unpredictable fisherman;
- one was prejudiced against Nazareth;
- one was a fanatic Jewish nationalist;
- one was a despised tax-collector;
- one was a skeptic/pessimist;
- two had such explosive tempers that they were nicknamed the "Sons of Thunder";
- and one was regarded as a thief and betrayer.
- Together, they argued among themselves about which disciple would be the greatest (Luke 9:46; 22:24).
- Jesus showed disappointment with them when they contradicted Him (Matthew 16:23).
- Repeatedly, Jesus spoke of His betrayal, death, and resurrection (Matthew 16:21-22; Mark 9:30; Luke 18:31-34), yet the disciples faltered when it actually happened.
- When the Passion began to unfold, all of them deserted him and fled (Matthew 26:56).

- Later, when the resurrected Jesus appeared to them as they were eating; he rebuked them for their lack of faith and their stubborn refusal to believe those who had seen him after he had risen” (Mark 16:20).
- While he stood among them and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’ They were startled and frightened.
- And then when he appeared before them in the flesh in his resurrected glory he asked them, ‘Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds’ (Luke 24:36-38).

What has this got to do with us today? I'm so glad you asked.

When I look around at this assembly this morning, while we look pretty good compared to them, we are all sinners in need of a savior.

Of course we have the benefit of 2000 years of Christian history to bolster our faith. But outside these walls there are millions of people who if asked would say, "How can you believe that 2000 years old fantasy?"

It's a valid question. And if I allow myself to ponder it too long, I begin to question my own intelligence.

- Miracle worker?
- Resurrected Messiah?
- An unseen heavenly home?

"How can I believe this stuff?" I ask myself.

But then I begin to think of what it means for me if what I question is not true. What if there is no miracle healer, no resurrected savior, no heavenly home? Then this is all there is! I live. I die. And within a generation or two I am forgotten. What is the point?

I don't want to make it sound like my faith is all about me, because it certainly isn't, but everything I am comes, my very identity, out of my faith.

- I was born into a Christian family.

- I have always gone to church and heard the Gospel preached and taught.
- At some level I have always known that God loves me.
- Through the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ, I choose to believe that I am forgiven.
- And because my filthy sinful self has been washed clean by the blood of the Lamb that John identified as Jesus Christ, I have the boldness to claim his love and forgiveness for me all while still being a sinner.

As I look around the room, you are all in the same boat. You are all dirty dirty sinners. You have no hope left unto your own self. And so we gather, today as one body of Christ, and proclaim that we love and worship God revealed in Jesus Christ for all his benefits, because without him, we are just a motley crew, an assembly of sinners, certainly no better than those original twelve disciples. We deserve each other! We belong together!

At one point in the Gospel of John, after a particularly difficult teaching many of Jesus followers turned away, and so he turned to the Twelve and asked,

John 6:67-69 "Do you also wish to go away?" ⁶⁸Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. ⁶⁹We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."

Those disciples who remained with Jesus from then on didn't have it figured out yet. They continued to blunder and make mistakes, so we can identify with them because we are made out of the same sinful stuff.

I'm not talking about DNA now, I'm talking about something much more important. What connects each person in the room today, and more than that, each Christian, and more than that, each created person is that we are sinners in need of savior, and we have one in Jesus Christ.

And because we are sinners and in need of a savior, and identify Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, we belong together.

Our DNA would indicate how different each of us is, but none of that matters because we all suffer from the same terminal illness of sinfulness. And the only thing that really matters past the present moment is, that we have a future, an eternal

future, thanks to our savior Jesus Christ, God's Messiah, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, not just the sin of black people, or Hispanic people, or white people or Lutherans, or Baptists or independents, or Americans or Germans. These are some of the ways we separate ourselves, but we shouldn't, because God simply sees us as sinners in need of a savior. But our identity as sinners in need of a savior has been surpassed by identifying with Jesus Christ, who is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. And with that in mind, we belong together.

So you see, as Pastor Carson told us, you and I, we belong here. He's right! To whom else shall we go? We have come to know and trust that only Jesus Christ our Lord has the words of eternal life. We are the church of Jesus Christ, an assembly of sinners saved by the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. You belong here. I belong here. We belong together.

Prayer

Loving, graceful, merciful God, without you we are nothing. But through the gift of your Messiah and our Lord Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, you call us your adopted children and heirs to your kingdom. Forgive us when we separate ourselves from others you love as much, and draw us together in peace and love and charity. Thank you for drawing us together this day to give you thanks and praise in Jesus' name.