

Sermon - John 1:29-42a

What He Did Right

01/15/2023

I was watching MASH years ago on late night TV. I enjoy the show on occasion because it tends to make fun of the Army and all the crazy things that can happen in war.

On this episode, I came in a little late, but from what I could discern Major Houlihan and Captain Pierce were evidently on some mission to give medical care to some soldiers out in the field away from the camp.

Somehow, while they were out there, they were separated from any support and found themselves lost with the enemy apparently either all around them or very close.

They were trying to hide in the rain hoping that someone would come and rescue them before the North Korean Army patrols picked them up. As they were hiding, they heard a noise in the underbrush and were trying to shush each other in case it was the enemy.

The camera then panned to where the noise was coming from and all we could see was a pair of combat boots walking towards the spot where they were hiding. Nothing on the uniform told you whether this was the enemy or a US Soldier.

When the soldier discovered them, the camera cleverly panned up to the face of the soldier as Hawkeye and Houlihan came out of the bushes. You immediately noticed that the soldier had Asian features and you figured that this was going to be an interesting show about how they survived a POW Camp in North Korea.

Then, everybody relaxed as soon as the soldier opened his mouth, “Are you that major and captain that is supposed to be lost?” he said with obvious American slang. “I’m on patrol and we were sent to find you.”

The show of relief and joy on their faces was clear and they joyfully went with the soldier.

As I look back on that episode, I often think that maybe too often we come like that soldier in the dark and cold of the world and nobody knows for sure who we are or what we are about as Christians today.

People often think we may be here to embarrass them because they are sinful or that we want to punish them for all the things that they have done wrong.

Like that soldier, we trudge through this world often not saying or doing anything that communicates to people who need to know the love and forgiveness that God offers us through faith in Christ Jesus.

Sometimes we could do much better showing people that we are sent from God. Today in the gospel lesson John the Baptist shows what it meant to be a person sent from God, and as John explains to us today, by God's Spirit, recognize when it's really God in our midst.

The Holy Spirit inspired John to write this account of John the Baptist that shows us 3 ways that people can show themselves to be of God and then recognize when God is truly present, testify as Jerusalem's representatives and come ready to baptize, and show them Jesus.

The first thing that John shows us is that we must testify as the representatives of Jerusalem.

Now the representatives of Jerusalem were the prophets who foretold Christ coming to this holy city. Now it's our job to be the new holy city prophets. This is what will mark us as ones sent by God. We now will proclaim the new heavens and the new earth that will usher in the age of the new City of Jerusalem.

This will all come to fruition when Jesus returns to take us home and put us in His new kingdom. In the meantime, we proclaim that truth and make sure that everybody knows what is right and what is wrong and for all of us who have sinned there is forgiveness in Christ Jesus.

This is something that the world needs right now.

In college athletics we see more rules infractions, more underage drinking and binge drinking, sadly more sexual assaults, and sadly not many people offering answers on how to fix the problem.

One night I was listening to an interview with Lee Corso who is the host of the ESPN college game day.

The interviewer was perplexed why college football coaches struggled so much with the rules that guide the conduct of their respective programs. Corso tartly replied, "They don't struggle at all, they simply choose to break the rules".

The announcer then went on to ask him why they made those choices. Corso replied that they wanted to make it easier to win, make more money, and have more fame.

Then Corso went on to explain his personal philosophy on what makes a good coach for college athletics. He said that a coach should never do anything that embarrasses himself or his family.

He should leave the program better than the way he found it, and he should have people saying about him that he may have been a lousy coach, but that man had impeccable integrity.

He went on to talk about how he had coached for 28 years at notable schools such as Florida State, and Louisville, and on the day when he left coaching forever, he acknowledges that it was his faith in God that got him through those difficult times before he became a famous broadcaster.

Now I know that may not necessarily be the kind of man we would want to coach our flying team of choice next year, but that is exactly the kind of person that shows they are sent by God and not by man.

The 2nd thing that John shows us is that he came to baptize.

God has shown us today in His text that these waters of baptism mark each one of us as people sent by God.

In these waters we were washed and regenerated in the spirit for the purpose of serving God's church through the kingdom of faith. This place is where we received our new identity as we were baptized in the name of Christ.

The last thing that John points out to us is that the anointed will be revealed. Christ our King is certainly obscured these days. We were caught up in the gifts under the tree and seemed to forget our giving to the church.

We were wrapped up in the spirit of the holidays and often forget that the Holy Spirit is what creates all our memories of Christ.

We pat ourselves on the back for *giving up* extra food and money to the poor and underprivileged and forget that Christ *gave up* His majesty, His divinity, and eventually His life because of our sin.

John may have been confused about that at first, after all he said in our lesson today, he didn't even know Jesus. Which is strange considering he is His cousin.

But it must depend on what John meant by "know"!

Surely, He knew who Jesus was, he just didn't understand *WHAT* Jesus was until he was alighted by the Holy Spirit at His baptism.

This would not be the first time John was confused. Later, in Matthew 11, he would find himself in jail sending his followers to Jesus to inquire if Jesus was the Messiah. Jesus replied,

“Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receives their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them.”

John learned and helped us see today that it is not what we know, it is what God reveals!

This is our good news!

When we fail as soldiers of the cross, to trudge through the rains and storms of this life to find the lost, lean not on your own understanding and regrets in life.

When we wantonly break the rules to make the money, get the easy way out, and grab the short-lived fame for doing so, we find out soon enough that cutting corners with sin is an endless hole in our soul that can never be short cut with paths to personal glory!

When we do things that embarrass our families, and leave organizations we oversaw, worse off than when they were when we arrived, don't look back at the sins that cannot be made up for, look to the one who forgives sin, redeems lives, and restores broken relationships for eternity to come.

Too often we will be just like John wondering if Jesus is really our Messiah or should we look for another?

Look no further than His holy word that tells of a man, who in three short years, became the most famous man for all time in all places.

Look to Him, who died on the cross for your sins, showing He was indeed God by rising from the dead and testifies, by His word, that every word that proceeds from His mouth is all the words we will ever need to live.

And forget what you did wrong, just remember, and believe in what He Did Right for You.
AMEN

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