

The Third Sunday in Advent
December 17, 2017

Text: John 1:6-8; 19-28
Theme: "Who are You?"

Who are you? That's a simple question. Can we give a ready answer? How do we answer that question? Do we state our name? Do we give more information? Do we share our position or station in life? "I'm Julie's mom." "I'm the manager of the warehouse." "I'm the king" (now would that not be nice). We often try to answer in a way that will mean something to the one asking. If you are mother of Peggy, Julie's good friend, then "I'm Julie's mom," is an identifying answer.

John is asked that question today. "Who are you?" He answers first of all as to who he is not. He is then given a couple of choices concerning his identity. His questioners were putting forth what they thought were possibilities. Finally John gives his final answer. He is THE VOICE.

Bear with me as I pull up a Mr. Potato Head. Who is this? This is actually the first time this spudoid has made a public appearance. I haven't found a name that I think fits him. It's just as well. Today he'll have the part of John the Baptist. Now on the other hand I have this fine specimen of a spud. I don't know if he's been a part of a sermon yet or not. I know he's been in CCA chapel once or twice. This is Sir Terrence Tator. I think he will have an even bigger role than nameless here. The plan is they help us get at the idea of minister and majesty. A minister is a servant. Majesty

is a royalty, a king. John had the opportunity to identify himself as majesty, but instead as a faithful minister he voices words pointing to the true King.

John the Baptist popped on the scene rather suddenly. His appearance and his crying voice certainly did not escape notice. He had a rather wild appearance. Nameless here is a bit wild with his pointy ear and big orange feet. We don't know anything about John's feet or his ears, but we do know that he dressed in a camel's hair garment with a leather belt around his waist holding everything in place. His diet was wild, locust and wild honey. No money needed and no trips to the marketplace. He was living off the land out there in the wilderness.

His appearance was not smooth, nor was his speaking. He confronted sinners calling for repentance. Great crowds went out to hear from Jerusalem, all Judea, and the region around the Jordan (Matthew 3:5). So sudden was his appearing and so disruptive his appearance some were asking if this one could be the Christ (Luke 3:15). To be the Christ was to be really somebody. The Christ was the long promised and awaited one. This one would be the promised son of David. This promise of a son of David to have an enduring kingdom was made first of all to David by the prophet Nathan (2 Samuel 7:12-17).

It would be repeated in the writing prophets. We are familiar with the words of Isaiah 9 which speak of one being on the throne of David and over his kingdom to establish it and uphold it (vs 7). We will reading this words one week from tonight in our candlelight service. In chapter 11 Isaiah writes of the root of Jesse who will be signal to the peoples (vs 10).

Jeremiah speaks of the Lord our Righteousness (Jeremiah 23:6). Ezekiel speaks of the David coming to shepherd his people (Ezekiel 34:23). If John would have said yes to the “Christ” question, he could have basked in some majestic recognition. Could he have laid the belt aside for royal sash and the bugs for the banquet table?

The official questioners, priests and Levites, sent from the officials in Jerusalem come to ask John officially, “Who are you?” After his initial ‘no’ to the Christ, they give him a couple of choices. “Are you Elijah?” (vs 21) Elijah had been taken up alive in a whirlwind. Since the days of Elijah God had said through the last of the OT prophets that He would send Elijah to prepare His way (Malachi 3:1) and that Elijah would come before the great and terrible day of the Lord (Malachi 4:5). Elijah had been someone not to mess with (just ask the prophets of Baal). People knew those prophecies from Malachi. Would Elijah, that same one, come back in some mighty way? Was John that Elijah?

The next choice of John identification was The Prophet, not just any prophet, but The Prophet. This is going back to Deuteronomy where Moses had told the people God would raise up another prophet like unto him and they were to listen to that prophet. There had never been another like Moses since Moses. Wonders without equal in number or magnitude had been done through Moses. There had not been another who communicated with God one to one like Moses. This prophet when he came would surely be mighty in word and deed. Both the Elijah and The Prophet would be somebodies, signs that would hard to miss.

John does give answer. He confessed first of all, “did not deny, but confessed, “I am not the Christ.”” (vs 20) Then he confessed two more times who he was not. ‘No, I am not Elijah,’ ‘No, not the prophet.’ There would be no crown or big signs on or over this one’s head. Just knowing who he was not was not a good enough answer. “Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us.” (vs 22) It would not do to go back, shrug their shoulders and say, “We don’t know who he is. We are not even sure he knows who he is.”

No, John was not ready to accept a crown or hold a big sign. His mission for all his wild appearance and forceful words was not to draw attention to himself. He was not interested in a magisterial role. Some of his disciples who became disciples of Jesus were much more interested in majesty. Jesus’ apostles each wanted the others to recognize his importance. The request would even be made to sit on His right and His left in His glory (Mark 10:37).

We may also have our majesty longings. Not that we actually want to be king, but we do like being recognized as those who are really somebody. We do delight in advancing self maybe even at the expense of others. It is really hard to get over majestic me.

But back to John. He does identify himself. “I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, “Make straight the way of the Lord.” (vs 23) John was asked why he was baptizing since he was not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor The Prophet. ‘Why are you stirring all these folks up this way?’

Why are you talking about approaching wrath and judgement? Does being the voice authorize you for such a call?’

His crying voice is not one crying his greatness but the Greater One. To two of his disciples he pointed to Jesus and voiced the words, “Behold, the Lamb of God.” (vs 1:29) Later when some of John’s followers were concerned that Jesus was starting to draw bigger crowds than him, John said, “He must increase, but I must decrease.” (3:30) John will say of Jesus, “this is the Son of God” (1:34). Yes, indeed this also the witness of the John who is the writer of the Gospel. ‘In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God...All things were made through Him, apart from Him has nothing been made that was made.’ (John 1:1, 3) The Word became flesh and dwelt among us and we have seen His glory. (John 1:14) Yes, the glory of the only Son from God, yet not in the days of walking this earth preaching, teaching, and healing, not in a blaze of glory.

In Him we see ministerial majesty. He lays aside the display of that glory, in fact, He lays aside His outer garments, takes the basin, and water, and towel and washes the feet of all those around that table who thought they were too majestic for the task. He lays aside the honor and glory and the crown of majestic and takes up the garment stained with His one blood running down from a brow pierced by a crown of thorns. He takes on all the filth of our sin. “The King of the Jews” is hung over His head in mockery, but in that mocking was some truth. He was and is the King of the Jews, but is more, King of kings. He offers Himself to atone for all our

royal delusions. His is the sacrifice, the cleansing blood for the washing away of our sins. It is complete, finished. It still is.

He is raised up. He shows Himself alive to those who knew just how dead He was. The one who initially doubted would upon seeing Him proclaim, "My Lord and My God." He would say to them, "Just as the Father has sent me, even so, I send you" (20:21). And sent they were on a mission, "If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven. If you do not forgive, they are not forgiven." (John 20:22-23) Those who previously had been concerned with having the highest positions begin to understand how to live out the majesty of ministry. The message continues to go out.

It has come to us. By the working of the Spirit we have believed. We understand the decrease of self-exaltation mean increase of the kingdom. We daily go back to the water of our washing of regeneration as those who need continual cleansing. We daily remember the Spirit has been poured out on us in those waters. The words of our Lord of forgiveness and life are music to our ears. Strengthened we are ready to walk in the paths He puts before us. Following Him we are those not quenching the Spirit, not despising prophecies, test everything to hold fast to what is good and to abstain from what is evil (1 Thessalonians 5:19-22).

We are ministers ministering to fellow ministers. We minister to the needs of body and soul. We rejoice with those who rejoice and we mourn with those who mourn. There are days when our service together is like the rejoicing at happiest wedding, other days when the burdens are so heavy we are bent near to despair. It is the Lord who lifts us up. We

minister to those who still think they are king knowing that God desires all to come to repentance.

We minister for the Majesty until the Majesty calls us to Himself or He returns in full majesty. What a day that will be. It's the Advent that is yet to arrive. "Now may the God of peace who Himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesu Christ. He who calls you is faithful; He will surely do it!" (1 Thessalonians 5:23) Amen