

John 1.19-28
Rorate coeli, 4th Sunday of Advent
23 December 2018
St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Topeka, Kansas

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Beloved in the Lord: grace be unto you and peace from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.
Amen.

I know. I know. You're ready. Even as you're sitting here this morning. Your heads are already elsewhere—or rather, *elsewhen*.

You're thinking about tomorrow.

About the kids' ETA.

About making your list and checking it twice. Shrimp ordered from Hy-Vee? Yup. Check. Cheese and crackers? Yup. Check. Goose out of the freezer and thawing? Yup. Check. Will the house get dusted one last time? Well, if I can get up early enough tomorrow it will. Okay. Check.

But today the cry and voice of the Baptist on Jordan's banks is this: stay in Advent for just another 24 hours.

Because what's coming down the road tomorrow and the next day isn't the year's biggest family gathering. It's something entirely different.

And the preparations for this entirely different thing have nothing to do with ETAs, shrimp, cheese and crackers, thawing geese and gleaming floors. For to properly receive what tomorrow brings—and the next day—the enfleshment of the very Son of God and His birth in Bethlehem—and to be ready for it is nothing other than to recognize Him who stands already in your midst.

At least that's what John said. He's not the prophet of the One who is yet to come. That was Moses' job, and Elijah's, and Isaiah's, and Malachi's. No. He's the preacher of Him who is already here. Of the One who stands in your midst.

Of course, this One in your midst—He's easy to overlook. Easy to miss. For then, as now, He hides His glory and majesty under a cloak of humility.

You'd think He'd be much more obvious. More remarkable—maybe like John, a locust-eating preacher who'd made the wilderness into his nave and pulpit and font. Someone you'd look at and just...get that feeling. Somebody with the kind of charisma that could gather a real following. A movement. The kind that gets some press.

At least that's what His contemporaries thought. And so they even asked John: "You! who are you?"

How flattering! But John confessed and he didn't deny, and he confessed, "I am not the Christ."

You know, that word “confess” is interesting. In Greek, ὁμολογέω [*homologéō*]. “I agree.” Agree with what? Agree with what God says...about me and about Himself.

John knew the answer his interrogators were after. He knew what he needed to say to “agree with” them.

But he *didn't* agree with them, he agreed *with God*.

And so He confessed and did not deny and confessed, “I am not the Christ.”

After all the flattery and adulation, it's God's truth that matters. And in the truth of God's holy Law John knows that John can't even save himself. Much less the people. No. He is not the Christ.

Neither are you.

And that's why you need to stay in Advent. Just for another 24 hours.

Now, I already know where your mind has gone: “Pastor, I know I'm not Christ.”

But if you really knew that ... then why are you so comfortable indulging in all your pet sins?

And what of all your excuses? “It wasn't really my fault.”

What of all the sins that are sins but you've somehow come to embrace as “just the way things are”?

And why are you so bored of gathering around the Lord's Word and Sacrament that it doesn't seem to you like what it is—the inestimable blessing of the forgiveness of sins in Christ—but a chore?

Let me ask you: is not all of that an attempt to do the job that only Jesus can do—to get rid of your sin? To deal with it on your own, whether by excuse or by feigned unconcern?

If it is, then your confession—your agreement—is not with God, but with the inquiring priests and Levites: Yes. I can take care of this problem on my own. I am...the Christ.

And if it's agreement with them, you must remain in Advent a little longer. For no matter how much your mind has turned to groceries and house cleaning and your relatives' ETAs..., neither do you know Him who stands in your midst. Nor are you ready to receive the gift tomorrow brings—and the next day. [And what drops from heaven on Christmas will bounce off you like the super ball in your Christmas stocking.]

If you're trying to deal with your sin and death and trying to extricate yourself from the devil's power on your own—repent.

For there already stands One in your midst.

He's already here. But don't miss Him. He's easy to miss. Everyone back in John's day thought the big attraction was the oddly dressed preacher.

But today the Lord Christ stands your midst in meekness. Just as He did on Jordan's banks.

Today He clothes all His majesty and power in humility. But He won't forever.

Today He goes invisible to every eye except the eye of faith. But someday He will be seen by every eye. Believing and unbelieving alike. When He comes in power and glory.

And then every knee of those in heaven and on earth and even under the earth shall bow. And then their tongues that would not make the good confession will be forced—forced by the raw majesty of it all and even against their own will—to confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. To agree with God about all He has said about them—they are sinners—and all that He has said about Himself—that He sent His Son Jesus into the world to save. [Even so, Lord Jesus, come. Come quickly.]

Of That One John was unworthy to untie the strap of His sandal. So are you. For He does no ignoble thing. Instead He, the Lord of heaven and earth, descends to become one with His creatures. And for no other reason than to bear their sin and their death and to rescue them from the jaws of hell.

And for That One John was nothing but a voice calling in the wilderness: Make straight the way of the Lord!

And if John was just a voice, what does that make you except for an ear?

John points. Therefore wherever that bony prophet's finger points your eyes must follow.

John proclaims. Therefore wherever his proclamation is made you must hearken. "Make everything flat for the Lord. Tear down the mountains of your sin!"

John speaks. Therefore wherever his speech is made you must listen. "Behold, the Lamb of God who bears the sin of the world!"

John baptizes. Therefore wherever water and God's Word are joined sin must be drowned and die and the new man daily emerge and arise to live before God in Christ's righteousness and purity.

John suffers the martyr's death in the image of His Savior. Therefore you too must be transformed to the image of His sufferings.

John disqualifies himself from Christ and counts himself a sinner. Therefore you too must come as nothing but a sinner before Him, who is the Lamb of God who has borne your sins.

You see, fellow-redeemed: the One who already stands in your midst? Now He comes in words, suffering, water, bread, and wine. Words that proclaim to all believers and to all who despair of their sins that they have been set free by His blood. Now He comes to those laid low by the holy suffering in His name with His comfort and with the peace that goes beyond all understanding. Now He comes in water, bread, and wine. Making His death the death of all believers in Christ. Making His life the life of all the faithful.

Word. Suffering. Water. Bread. Wine. Hidden. Meek. Humble.

That's the One who already stands in your midst.

And if you would know and receive what tomorrow brings—and the next day—then you must know and receive the One who already stands in your midst in Word and Sacrament.

But if that's boring. And if you've only got a half-hearted reception of the One who's already among you, then I'm sorry to tell you: what comes tomorrow—and the next day—holds nothing for you.

Because the One who comes tomorrow, and the next day—don't mistake the beauty of your creche for His humility. Don't mistake all the nostalgia that'll pack itself into the next days for time of grace His birth ushers in. And don't mistake all the shrimp and crown roast you can eat for what He comes to bring and give: the forgiveness of sins in His blood.

Instead, just stay in Advent a little longer. And learn to confess with John, "I am *not* the Christ. But I worship this One who already stands in our midst."

Amen.

pax domini, etc.

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