Sermon – John 1.19-28 (Advent 4 – 2018)

Let us pray: Lord God, heavenly Father, it is good and right that we should give thanks to You, that You have given us a glorious baptism like that of John the Baptist, and that therein You have promised us the forgiveness of sins, the Holy Spirit, and everlasting life through Your Son, Jesus Christ: We beseech You, by Your grace and mercy preserve us in such faith, that we never doubt Your promise, but be comforted by our baptism in all temptations; and grant us Your Holy Spirit that we may renounce sin, and ever continue in the righteousness bestowed on us in baptism, until, by Your grace, we obtain our eternal salvation; through the same, Your beloved Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one true God, now and forever. Amen.

Grace to you and peace from God, our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

19 Now this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" 20 He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." 21 And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No." 22 Then they said to him, "Who are you, that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?" 23 He said: "I *am*`The voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Make straight the way of the LORD,"' as the prophet Isaiah said."

24 Now those who were sent were from the Pharisees. 25 And they asked him, saying, "Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" 26 John answered them, saying, "I baptize with water, but there stands One among you whom you do not know. 27 "It is He who, coming after me, is preferred before me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose." 28 These things were done in Bethabara beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by the truth, your word is truth. Amen.

**Who Do You Think You Are?**

Dear fellow redeemed,

John the Baptist was creating quite a commotion out by the Jordan. People, not just from the immediate locality came out to see him, but people from the whole region came to hear his preaching and to be baptized by him.

So certainly, the religious leaders of the Jews, the Sanhedrin, became aware of John’s ministry. They were wondering by what authority John was doing this work. He wasn’t sent out under their authorization. Who does this guy think he is?

So they asked him, “**Who are you?**” Many people had already been wondering if he was the Christ, as Luke says in chapter 3, “**all reasoned in their hearts about John, whether he was the Christ or not.**” They didn’t ask John whether he was, but John figured that was what they were wondering.

Think of what temptation faced John here. He could claim to be the Christ. He already had followers, so many people were coming to him. He could take the exalted status of the one promised and spoken of throughout the Old Testament. But John spoke truly. “I am not the Christ.” the Gospel writer really emphasized what John did here, “**he confessed, and did not deny, but confessed.**” He ὡμολόγησεν, which is sometimes translated *confessed* as we have here, other times it is translated *agree*, *declare*, or *acknowledge*. But each of these translations are related to the literal meaning of the word, ὁμολογέω, which is *to say the same thing*. As one pastor says, confessing is same-saying.

And John said the same thing as whom? Well, he is simply repeating what God says. He is not the Christ.

And Elijah? The angel who announced to Zechariah about John’s birth, said that John will go before the Christ “**in the spirit and power of Elijah**” (Luke 1:17). Jesus meant the same thing when He said, **“[John] is Elijah who is to come**” (Matthew 11:14). But the Jews had a wrong understanding of what this prophecy meant. And so that he would not mislead them in their wrong understanding, he denied he was Elijah.

And the Prophet? John denied that he was the prophet promised in Deuteronomy 18.

But he says he is who God says he is in Scripture: `**The voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Make straight the way of the LORD,"**'.

He confesses that he is the forerunner of the Christ by God’s authority, and by this same authority, John baptizes as a means of forgiveness for all the repentant.

John not only confesses who he is, but he also confesses who Christ is. The Christ comes after him, in that John’s public ministry comes before Christ’s, since John’s ministry prepares the way for Jesus. But the Christ is also before Him. The Christ comes before Him in time, because He is the eternal Son of God, uncreated, and without beginning. And He comes before Him also in office, because John’s office was forerunner, Christ carries the threefold office of the Prophet, the Priest, and the King.

John gives us a great example of confessing, of same-saying, if you will.

But the flesh and the world resists confessing. Our postmodern world resists it as well.

We live in day in age in this world, where a person is encouraged to say for themselves who they are. Who do you think you are? Well, the world will tell you to pay no mind to reality or truth or to what God says. You decide. The world says that a boy can be a girl and vice versa, when God says He “created them male and female.” And when it comes to morality, the world calls evil good and good evil. Rather than to confess the truth of God’s Word, we are pressured to be obedient to and confess the latest fads and morals of this godless culture.

Our sinful flesh resists the truth of God’s Word, for Scripture says, “**the carnal mind is enmity against God.**” Our sinful flesh does not desire to say the same thing God says. Whether it is to deny our sin, or to claim that we’re children of God some other way than through Christ, the human flesh is capable of saying anything other than what God says in Scripture.

But through baptism, we are born again, the Holy Spirit producing in us faith to trust in Christ and His forgiveness, making us adopted children of God. And through this faith, in the Spirit, we are able to confess as John did, saying what God says.

We confess our sins, as we have earlier on in the service. God says in His law that we are sinners, that we have sinned against Him in thought, word, and deed. And we say the same thing. Yes, I am a sinner, I have sinned in thought, word, and deed. I have sinned by not acknowledging my sins as I should. I have sinned by being ashamed of Christ, not readily acknowledging Him to others.

But then I say to you the same thing God says. I pronounce you forgiven for the sake of Christ’s sacrificial death on the cross. Who am I to say such things? By what authority do I say this to you? Am I the Christ? No. I am not the Christ. But I am a pastor called by Christ through you, the congregation, to give you the baptism of forgiveness and pronounce you forgiven. My authority comes from Christ. His Word says, “**If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us all our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.**” He says, “**If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them.**” So to you penitent, I say the same thing God says by His authority, I am Christ’s mouthpiece saying to you, “You are forgiven. You are cleansed.”

And you can confess the same thing God’s Word says! “I am forgiven.” And you can say all sorts of things now because of that forgiveness. And you can say these things, not because it’s wishful thinking, or because you have come up these things on your own, but because these are the very things that God says about His believers. “I am God’s baptized child. I am an heir of His eternal kingdom. Nothing shall separate me from the love of God in Christ Jesus. He has freed me from the bonds of sin and the devil to serve Him in righteousness! Death no longer has claim over me, but in Christ, I have life now and eternally!”

And in that freedom and victory that Christ has won for us, we can confess our gracious triune God as we do in the Apostles’ and Nicene Creed. This is the true God, the God who created me and preserves me, who redeemed me, and who has given me true faith and the Christian life!

So who do you think you are? Well, we are who God says we are, and we gladly confess it. And more than that, we gladly confess the Christ, God made flesh in Bethlehem, our Savior. Amen.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.