

December 31, 2017

## **Identity and Purpose of Jesus**

### PRAYER

May the words of my mouth be meditations of our hearts and be always acceptable unto Thee. O Lord our strength and our redeemer.

AMEN

### SERMON

Every year on the first Sunday after Christmas, we hear the same gospel reading. It is the first 18 verses of the gospel according to John. I made no secret of the fact that the gospel according to John is my favorite. I love that John, the beloved disciple, presents the gospel through not only his eyes and his mind, but his heart. What has been revealed to him in his time spent with Jesus.

And I believe in the time after Jesus' resurrection, as he contemplated, as he reflected on all that he had experienced with Jesus. All that has gone on since including the Pentecost and the giving of the Holy Spirit. And I think that is what leads John to begin his gospel, not with a rendition of the virgin birth, but his understanding of the true identity of this Jesus of Nazareth whom he traveled with for 3 years. Who he learned from, his teachings, what he witnessed in the performing of miracles. And through his passion, his death and his resurrection. And it leads him to present these first verses of his gospel as an understanding of who Jesus is and his understanding of the purpose that Jesus played in the world.

He immediately links Jesus-this man that he has walked with for 3 years with the God of creation. In the beginning was the word and the word was with God, and the word was God. He sees Jesus as that word. He does not go into the virgin birth, but the virgin birth does explain that

same truth. That God and humanity came together in that moment and walked together through those years in order to reconcile completely God and humanity.

And it was the way that John understood the salvation being offered to humanity. And he links it so much with creation that it is a reminder to us how God sees us. How God sees us as being not just a part of creation but a part that is good. If you recall the story from Genesis through the six days of creation. After each day, after each creation God declares it is good, and at the end it declares all of creation very good. It is that God who now unites himself with that very creation. The creation that has fallen from the hopes and dreams of God. To have a creation in harmony. To have a creation that is living in relationship with God as it was intended to be.

It is God's way of making that final determination of reconciling creation from itself. To lift it up and to forgive it from its fallenness. And that is what we see in the person of Jesus. The fullness of humanity from the virgin Mary. The fullness of God, the creative word, the creative force of God, being united in order to bring that forgiveness, that reconciliation to have it completely. To make it possible.

And so, John very eloquently unites the word and humanity. God and man humanity. So, we have that identity clarified for us by John and then he tries to set up the purpose of Jesus. Now that we know who and what he is, why did God do this?

And although there are more than a couple, two stand out to me as I read this epilogue of John. The first is that he is the light. He is the light that has come into the world. It is a light that enables humanity to see creation and in fact to see themselves as God sees them. It is that light that pushes back the darkness that is created through the pain and suffering in the world that causes darkness. It is the light that helps us

to see not only what is but what God hopes for it to be. A creation reconciled, a humanity reconciled and forgiven. A humanity that is coming to a very special place in relationship with God. And we are recipients of that light. Not only to see the world because of the light that has come into it. It has shown us what God sees but also because it is the light that we carry. It is a light that enters into the life of those who believe. So that we can help others also see the God's intention in creation. So, we can see in a sense through the eyes of God. And we can acknowledge the world and one another in the way that God sees creation and the way that God sees you and me.

The other purpose that I see John really hold up is that he came into the world to give us the power to become God's children. In much of Jesus' teachings he refers to what he is bringing to the world as God's kingdom. And it is important to know and understand that in a community that Jesus is creating. But humanity has struggled with exactly what relationship we are to have with our creator, with God, with the redeemer and sustainer of the world. What is it, that relationship that we should have?

And when we hear citizens of God's kingdom, I at least think in terms of having a rule to follow. To have an understanding that God is holy other, and creates for us a community that we can participate in. Before that, we have a sense or at least question, are we simply here to serve God? Are we in some way supposed to live our lives in a manner that lifts God up and actually brings humanity to a lower level. We are after all only creatures. And therefore, how can we have any kind of relationship, real relationship, with God?

John in his time with Jesus sees it very differently. Not just as creatures, not just as citizens of this new community called the kingdom of God, but as children. God comes to us in Jesus. To reconcile, to forgive, but

also to establish an even deeper intense relationship with humanity. A relationship that reflects God's intention in creation, I believe. Because I am convinced that God created in order to express the love that is God's nature. And to have in creation, humanity that can understand and receive God's love. And through feeling and receiving that love are able to be moved to love God back. And this relationship is deeper than one being to another. It is a familial relationship. A relationship of not just creator to created but father/mother to child. After all, isn't that what Jesus expressed as he was teaching his disciples how to pray?

How do we address God? Abba, father, daddy? That relationship that is intimate, that relationship that is deeper than the casual relationship from one person to another. A relationship of blood, a relationship of being of the same stuff. Not just an image, but true children of God. And in being true children of God, having that relationship of knowing and understanding God's love for me. It is also knowing God's love for you. Knowing that all of us, God desires all of us to be his children.

To receive his love, to return that love to God. And in so doing, to begin to see each other. Not as strangers, not as enemies but as brothers and sisters. If God is Abba, if you are a beloved child of God, son or daughter. If I am beloved son of God, that makes us brothers and sisters. Not to compete with one another for the resources of the world. For power and for authority, but to recognize one another through love. To reach out and help those who are in need when we have abundance. To be able to receive from others who have abundance when we are in need. Not just of resources, but when we are in need of human companionship and love. When we are in need of being fed, when we are thirsty, when we are sick, when we are imprisoned.

We are called as God's children to recognize one another, no matter where they come from. No matter what language they speak. No matter what belief they live by. To see by the light of Christ, not what is on the surface, not what is only outwardly displayed but to be able to see each other as God sees each of us. To see to the heart, to see what we were created to be. To see the great love that God has for me and for the other.

In this gospel according to John, the one who spent 3 years of his life traveling with Jesus, hearing his teachings, watching his interactions, seeing the miracles that were performed, being the one who Jesus entrusted with Mary his mother as he hung on the cross. It is his truth. It is his understanding, and he longs for it to be ours. To know that in Jesus we have God and humanity come together. That in Jesus we have a light to hold up to the world, to see the world as God intended it to be seen and experienced. To remind us that God loves us so much that he calls us not to be servants, creatures, even citizens of kingdom, but as his beloved children. May we receive that truth as our own. May we return God's love that he gives to each of us and may we see one another especially in this new year as God's children. And as such, as our brothers and sisters.

Greg Hein – Rector

Renee' Evans - Transcriber