

Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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January 8, 2006
1st Sunday after Epiphany
2 Samuel 7:8-11,16
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Isaiah 49:1-6
Psalm of the Day: Psalm 2
Second Lesson: Acts 16:25-34
Gospel: Mark 1:4-11

The Savior is Pointed Out

If you have spent much time visiting people in hospitals or ever spent time in hospitals yourself, one of the things maybe you have noticed—I have seen it happen time and time again—is that most hospital staff are trained very well that if they see someone with a glazed look in their eyes staring blankly at a wall to stop and ask, “Can I help you find what you are looking for?” I saw it happen time and time again when I was in Rochester and visiting in the Mayo Clinic. I see it in the hospitals I visit in Green Bay. Sometimes hospitals aren’t the easiest things to get around in, especially since it would seem like every time I would have one hospital figured out, then they would have some construction some place and they would reroute you all the way around another way, and you would be lost again and have to learn everything all over again. The hospital staff is pretty good at pointing you to where you are trying to go.

The other thing that I have noticed is that if you take the time to get used to looking around and seeing the signs, they have signs on most of the walls right as you get out of an elevator. The signs are right there telling you which way you need to go if you just stop and pay a little attention for a little bit and look around. You will find your way around. In fact, in the Mayo hospitals in Minnesota, when you would go visit there, the signs were also in Aramaic because they had so many people coming from the Middle East and it would point them to where they needed to go. Those kinds of signs are helpful and useful.

This morning, the first Sunday after Epiphany, we are really in a season of the church year that does a lot of pointing out. During the season of Epiphany, Jesus is pointed out. He is revealed. He is made known, as not only the Savior of the Jews as our reading from Isaiah said, but that is too small of a thing. He will be a Savior for all nations. During Epiphany, we see how Jesus is pointed out as the Messiah, or the Anointed One is literally what that word means—the one who is anointed to be the prophet, priest and king who would redeem all people from their sins and buy them back from their sins.

This morning, as we consider his baptism, we see how his baptism points him out as Savior. In our text we see that not only his baptism points him out as our Savior, we see the ministry of John the Baptist pointing away from himself and to the one who would follow him. Then we see the Trinity, our Triune God itself, pointing out Jesus as the Messiah—the Anointed One—the one who would redeem the world.

The ministry of John the Baptist pointed out Jesus as the Messiah in an unusual way. It wasn't what you would have expected as someone who was going to be the forerunner of the Messiah. He wasn't in Jerusalem. He wasn't in the population centers. He was out in the dessert regions across the Jordan River. Not a highly populated place, not a place where necessarily there would be a lot of people flocking to hear him or to see him, and yet once he began his ministry and started preaching "repent because the kingdom of God is near" and he preached with a power and authority of the very Words of God, people did flock to see him. It says the whole Judean countryside went there and the people of Jerusalem went out to him. They made a special trip or journey to hear what was this John that they had heard about—who was he, what was he saying, what was so different about him.

He pointed people to Jesus first of all by pointing them to look inside themselves. He said to take a look inside yourself and then change, repent. Repent of your sin. Realize that your sin separated you from God, that you can't approach God on your own, much like we saw in our Bible study this morning on the Day of Atonement. Because of your sin, you are unclean, you can't approach God, so you need to repent.

Then he pointed the people to the Messiah by having a baptism for the forgiveness of sins—a baptism that had the attachment to it of the promise of forgiveness. The people came to him. When they came to him they saw a guy that was dressed funny—camel's hair, leather belt. He had a funny diet. He ate locusts and wild honey. They might have gone home with an image that stuck in their mind. A lot of them ended up being his disciples and being taught by him and following him. No doubt Satan wanted to use all of that to appeal to his ego and have him think that he was the one that was doing all of the work and that God was lucky to have someone like him. Yet, you see John the Baptist in Mark's gospel being a humble servant of God and pointing people away from himself and to the one who he wasn't even worthy to stoop down and get his nose in the dirt and the dust and untie his sandals. The one that was coming was the one that they should pay attention to. He pointed away from himself and he pointed people to the one that he was preparing the way for. He prepared the way by telling people to turn from their sin and he prepared the way by pointing people then to the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

John had a unique ministry. He knew that he was going to point people directly to Jesus and that he would be right there right then. That was unique in all the prophets. But it is not unique when you compare it to you and me because you and I know sin. We have God's Law before us on paper. We can look at it and we can see that if we hate our brother in our heart, we are a murderer. If we lust after someone, we are an adulterer. We can see that in our thoughts and in our words and in our actions we have sinned against God and we too have a need to repent. Not only do we have it, but the people around us have it. And you and I know who Jesus is and what he has done. We have seen the fulfillment. We have listened to John point us to him. We have seen the Trinity point us to him. We have had the Holy Spirit leads us by the hand through Baptism and through the Word and lead us to Jesus and say, "Here is the answer for your sin." He is the one that takes away your sin because he never committed any of the sins that you commit and his perfection has been given to you. You and I know these truths. You and I know that he died on the cross to take away our sins.

So now, like John, you and I are privileged to be able to point people to Jesus. Not point them to our church, not point them to a specific teacher or preacher, but point them to Jesus.

Are you ready to do that? Are you ready to say, "This is who Jesus is and what he has done for you. This is how he has taken away your sin." Or are you more comfortable saying, "Why don't you come to church and hear it from our pastor." You and I have been privileged to do this. As all Christians, we are a royal nation, a holy priesthood, that we may declare the praises of him who called us out of darkness into his wonderful light. We all have been called by God to preach the Word—be prepared in season and out of season. Always be ready to give an answer for the hope that we have.

But have you ever found yourself shying away from giving that answer? Have you ever found yourself changing the subject? Have you ever found yourself saying, "I don't know what to say?" Have you ever found yourself the next day, or maybe that night lying in bed, thinking, "I should have said this. I could have said that. I failed my God. I failed to point people to Jesus." I have to believe that we all have. Even if we haven't noticed it, we have done it. We have failed to carry out the task that God has called to us. We have fallen short of carrying out the command our God has given us to always be ready to share him. But our God died for these sins also. He was perfect in our place and shared his message faithfully. And then he died for the times that you and I have failed to do so. As we consider this intense love our God has for us that washes away all of our sins, not just the ones that we think are big or major, but every last sin that we have committed, as we truly contemplate that truth, the Spirit moves us to want to share Christ and to want to learn more how we can do it better. And then we want to learn what it is we can say and how we can share God's love in Christ in our words and in our actions.

God will help us to do that. What God wants us to do is simply to point people to Jesus just as God himself did. The Trinity—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—at Jesus' Baptism were all there pointing out Jesus. The Spirit did it as he descended in the form of a dove and landed on Jesus. He was anointed with the Holy Spirit and with power. That is what Messiah means, Anointed One. And here is where he was anointed. He was anointed with the Holy Spirit and power to be our prophet who speaks the Word to us, to be the priest who would offer himself as our sacrifice, to be the king that would rule in our hearts forever through his gospel. The Father is there in the voice that says, "*You are my Son, whom I love*". He points that out to people and says, "Listen to him" as we are told in the other gospels. But Jesus himself is pointing to himself as Savior when he comes to John the Baptist and is baptized. We are told in one of the other gospels that when Jesus got there, John said, "I shouldn't be baptizing you. You should baptize me." But Jesus said, "No. We must do this to fulfill all righteousness."

Remember John's baptism, as we said earlier, was a baptism for the forgiveness of sins, right? Jesus had no sins. He had no need to be baptized for the forgiveness of sins, so why is he fulfilling all righteousness. How is he fulfilling all righteousness by walking into the Jordan and having John pour some water on him? The answer is in the last verse of the hymn we just sang. He is our substitute. He is taking our place. He is

standing in for us. He is saying at his baptism, “I am going to stand in for all of those who are sinful and need baptism. I am going to take their place. I am going to be perfect in their place and then I am going to die in their place.” He is pointing out himself as the one who would be the substitute.

Now think also about what his Father said about his desire to be that substitute. He said, “This is my Son. With him I am well pleased.” Why was he pleased with him? Did he like the way he was dressed that day? What is he talking about? I have to think that it is because he willingly came to be our substitute. I don’t think the Triune God works the way you and I might do at times at our meetings. I don’t think they had a meeting in heaven and Jesus didn’t show up so they voted and said, “Let’s send him to be the substitute so we don’t have to.” I don’t think that is how it worked. I think Jesus willingly from all eternity knew that he was going to be the one who would stand in our place and die in our place, and he willingly went, and he lovingly went, because of the love he has for you and I and the desire he has for you and I to have our sins taken away.

You and I might joke about having to serve God. We might view serving God as a burden that we do or serving others as a burden that we do and laugh about it, but I don’t think Jesus does. I think he willingly came because of his desperate love for you and me and he was desperate for what he could provide—which is the forgiveness of sins. I think that is why the Father said, “With him, I am well pleased.”

Our God has loved us with this kind of perfect love. He is pointed out clearly by himself and by sending others so that you and I would know who has taken away our sins. As we see just how deep the Savior’s love is for us, we too are going to be eager to point out the Savior to others.