

Come To Me

I preach this morning in the name of God, the Father, the + Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today is the fifth Sunday after Pentecost and we continue in the Days Following Pentecost. And in these Days Following Pentecost, we are reminded of the person, of the power, and of the presence of the Holy Spirit that was poured out upon the Early Church. But not only upon the Early Church, but upon our lives too. For in the waters of Holy Baptism, Jesus calls us to Himself; Jesus claims our lives as His very own; and Jesus redeems our lives from the depths of Sheol and forgives us all our sins.

Today is the fifth Sunday after Pentecost and, on this Fourth of July weekend, we celebrate and we give God thanks for the freedoms that we have as citizens of this great nation, as citizens of the United States of America. And we do not take those for granted, we give God thanks for those. Although the festivities and the celebrations may look different from years past, yet I'm sure we're still enjoying some great time with friends and family and those whom we love the most.

It's kind of like a story that I heard this week of a Catholic priest and a Jewish rabbi who were enjoying a nice communal gathering on the Fourth of July in their town. They enjoyed this wonderful picnic together and they were breaking bread together. And over the meal, the priest began to poke fun at the rabbi. He said to him, "Oh, boy, this is such good ham! You don't know what you're missing out on. I know it's against your religion and all, but I just don't understand why you forbid such wonderful food." Well, the rabbi shrugged his shoulders, pushed it off, and the priest continued, "Oh, you don't know what you are missing. You are missing something here! You haven't lived until you have had Mrs. Warren's prized Virginia-baked ham. Tell me, Rabbi, tell me, when will you finally give up? When will you finally break down and try some of this wonderful ham?" And he shrugged his shoulders again, but this time he looked up with a grin on his face and said, "Okay, okay. I will finally break down and try Mrs.

Warren's famous, prized baked ham on the day of your wedding." We enjoy Fourth of July celebrations, and although they look different this year, yet we still celebrate in a very unique way.

Now, two weeks ago, if you were here, we started a mini message series and we finished it last week on Romans chapter 6. We called it, "You Are Alive" and what we looked at two weeks ago is the great doctrine of the church, the great Doctrine of Justification by Faith that says that we are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone, all of which is revealed in the words of Holy Scripture alone. This doctrine, of course, was not penned until the latter part of the Middle Ages and really took off in advanced development in the Protestant Reformation. But last week we said this: that we are alive in God all because of the grace of God. And today we look at the consequential realities of what it means to respond in an ongoing fashion to the presence of the Lord, who invites you to come to Himself.

Today, our lesson is about coming to Jesus. And coming to Jesus is three things today: coming to Jesus is knowing that your true identity is found only in Him; coming to Jesus is understanding that the reality of truth you are seeking is not revealed inside, but rather outside of yourself; and coming to Jesus is laying down at the feet of Jesus all the things that weigh you down, all the things that hold you back. And that's what our lesson is about today - it's about coming to Jesus.

So, let's take a look. As always I invite you to take your Bibles out and turn to Matthew chapter 11, we begin at verse 16. And while you're turning there in the scriptures, let me give you some context and set the stage for our lesson today. Now, in Matthew chapter 11, Jesus has instructed and He has sent out His disciples in the authority to cleanse those with disease and illness and to cast out demons and evil spirits. And as He sends them out, Jesus himself goes out because verse 1 tells us "He went to all the towns and villages in Galilee." And as Jesus is going out, he is met by some of John's disciples because John has a

question for Jesus, verse 3 of chapter 11, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?"

You know, yes, even the greatest prophets like John the Baptist have their seasons of doubt. Even the greatest of men, the greatest women of faith, had their seasons of doubt, had their seasons of despair, had their seasons of fear. But in spite of John's fears, in spite of John's insecurities, Jesus names the purpose of his mission and the place of his identity. For He says in verse 4, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see. The blind will receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor."

Jesus is speaking about the purpose of His mission and the place of His identity, not only for Himself, but also for John too. For now He turns to the crowd and says to them in verse 7, "What did you go out into the desert to see? A reed swayed by the wind? If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in kings' palaces. Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written: 'I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.'"

You see, both Jesus and John were grossly misunderstood. John was said to have had a demon because of his austere lifestyle living out in the wilderness, taking in a steady diet of locusts and honey. And Jesus was said to have been a glutton and a drunkard because of His out-of-the-box living, bringing those who the leaders of the synagogue would cast out of the city, associating with the lowly, associating with the broken.

Both John and Jesus are grossly misunderstood. And, you know, a misunderstanding of mission always flows out of a misunderstanding of identity. And a confrontation like this Jesus does not turn His back from, but rather He turns His eyes to, verse 16, "To what can I compare this generation? They are like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling out to others: 'We played the

flute for you, and you did not dance; We sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.' For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.' The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.' But wisdom is proved right by her actions."

You see, coming to Jesus is knowing that your true identity is found only in Him. While the twelve disciples, sent out earlier in Matthew's gospel, only had partial understanding of this truth, yet the crowds to whom Jesus is speaking now do not. Because, you see, the ministry of John was a ministry of preparing the hearts and the minds of the people to repent of their sins and to come back to the Lord, to make the way for the Messiah into the world. For the Lord said through the prophet Isaiah in chapter 40, "A voice of one calling: 'In the wilderness prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all people will see it together. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken'" (*Isaiah 40:3-5*).

John's ministry was a ministry of preparing the hearts and the minds of the people to receive their Messiah. And John's ministry was no doubt a ministry of repentance. For on that one occasion when the Pharisees and the scribes came to John to be baptized by him, with all authority given to him, he said in Matthew chapter 3, verse 7, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire."

Wow! Talk about a message of repentance! Talk about a heavy message to receive. John, he sang a dirge and they did not mourn. He called the people to repentance and they chose to stay in their sin. And he led them to the Messiah,

who was prophesied from the very beginning of time, and they knew Him not. John was grossly misunderstood, but his identity was in God, which brings us to the second point of our lesson of how Jesus' ministry was misunderstood.

Coming to Jesus is first knowing that your true identity is found only in Him. And coming to Jesus is understanding that the reality of truth you are seeking is not revealed inside, but rather outside of yourself, verse 19, "The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.' But wisdom is proved right by her actions. [Verse 25] At that time Jesus said, 'I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure. All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom he chooses to reveal him.'"

Coming to Jesus is understanding that the reality of truth you are seeking is not revealed from inside of yourself, but rather outside of yourself. John's ministry was grossly misunderstood, and so was Jesus' ministry, too, because Jesus came to seek and to save the lost. From the beginning of Jesus' ministry, He purposed His mission to go to the outcast, the marginalized. He went to those who did not have a need for a doctor, but those who did have a need for *the* doctor. Because Jesus, Himself, was the Lord, Jehovah Rapha, "the Lord who is our healer."

Jesus purposed His ministry to go to those who were marginalized, to go to the unjust, to go and speak life to those who are dead. Jesus' purpose in His ministry from the very beginning of time was to go to the lowly of heart - those who were despised, those who were neglected. And Jesus Christ comes today for you. You, who are carrying that heavy burden; You, who are burdened by the ways of life that we see experienced in our world today. And this kind of understanding, this kind of truth, never is revealed in and of yourself. It is only

revealed when the Holy Spirit calls you by name and Jesus Christ, Himself, reveals Himself to you.

Jesus is the embodiment of truth and He is looking at them right in the eyes and they do not receive Him. I wonder how many here, I wonder how many watching online, you've been to church, you've experienced church services, you have been in the presence of the Holy God who made you and who redeemed you, but we have become so comfortable. I wonder how many have neglected to know that we are in the very presence of God.

They looked at Jesus eye-to-eye and they missed the embodiment of truth. Not some theological understanding, but a person: Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who laid down His life for the sins of the world.

You'll never find this truth by looking at how many diplomas you have, by looking at how many titles you have behind your name. You will only find this truth when the truth of Jesus Christ finds you. And when the truth of Jesus Christ finds you, you lay down your burdens - the burden of your sin, the burden of your guilt, the burden of your shame, the burden of your neglect. You lay it all down at the feet of Jesus Christ because you realize, for the first time in your life, this has weighed you down. You have been carrying a burden that you are not designed to carry and you respond to the greatest invitation ever to be given, verse 28, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest..." Did you hear it? "...Rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Jesus knew his ministry because the prophet Isaiah said in chapter 61, "The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God,

to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion - to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair" (*Isaiah 61:1-3*).

Laying down your burdens at the feet of Jesus Christ is true freedom. Coming to Jesus is lastly laying down at the feet of Jesus all the things that weigh you down, all the things that hold you back. What is holding you back? What burdens have you come into this worship space this morning carrying? The burdens of injustice? The burdens of racial tension in our country? We celebrate the freedoms that we have because God is a benevolent Father, but we must continue to pray on our knees because there are many in our world, even I would say, many in our communities who have yet to experience the freedom of God in Christ Jesus. And there is only one way to have true freedom in this life, there is only one person in whom you will find liberty, where you can serve the Lord with joy in your heart, and that is in a personal and a transformational relationship with Jesus Christ.

Do you know Jesus today? He is calling you by name. He loves you and He is calling you. He hasn't forgotten you, so lay down your burdens. Lay down your burdens and you will find life in His name. You are carrying the burdens of the world. You are carrying the burden of your sickness. You are carrying the burden of that memory. But today, lay it down and you will find rest for your soul. Surrender it all to Jesus.

Wherever you are worshipping Jesus, today is the day to lay down your burdens, to lay down the things that are weighing you down because Jesus is waiting for you. Jesus is calling your name. It's not by accident that you're here today. It's not by accident that you're tuning in online - Jesus is calling you. He's calling you to experience true freedom in Him.

So lay down your burdens. Lay down your burdens and you will find rest for your souls. Amen