

“The Testimony of John” (John 1:15-34)

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Opening Prayer

Good Morning, and welcome to KUMC/PCUMC. We hope and pray that you will find our church to be loving and Godly. We are finally into March, and God-willing within the next month or so we will begin to see the changing of the seasons. Flowers, birds, warm air, and the like will all come our way before we know it. Similar to how the seasons are changing right now, so too is our season in the church changing. This last Wednesday we entered the time of the year known as “Lent” when we worshipped on Ash Wednesday. Between Ash Wednesday and Easter, a forty day period, we focus on the life and actions of Jesus. Now if you pay attention much in church you probably know already that Jesus is important, that He bore our sins to the cross to pay for our evil deeds, and that it is by His blood that we are saved. You may also know some of the other characteristics of Jesus, that He is fully God and fully man, that He lived a perfect and sinless life, that there are many prophecies in the Old Testament that foretell His coming, so on and so on. While we talk about all these things year round, during Lent, during this forty day period, we really focus in on the aspects of Jesus. Much of our church time is usually devoted to asking the question of “what is the Lord asking me to do, or what is it that I must do to be saved?” We usually are talking about “What” questions... during Lent the question is “Who.” “Who is it that saves us, and Who is it that calls me to action?” The major answer is Jesus of course, but to answer more about who He is we are going to go through the Gospel of John over the next forty days. Last month we got a taste of how John writes in 1st John, this time around we are looking at his first-hand account about our Savior. As a side note, as we go through this throughout Lent, I would invite you to be in prayer and reading this along with me. You can find a list of the scriptures that we are reading each Wednesday and Sunday, and if you

read them on your own and spend a little time in contemplation it will greatly increase your faith. It will also make these sermons more applicable to your actual lives. As we begin our walk through this Gospel, we start where John started... with John the Baptist, who proclaimed that Jesus was not only the Lamb of God but also God in human flesh.

John 1:15 reads “John testified about Him and cried out, saying, ‘This was He of whom I said, He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.’” John the Baptist’s testimony in the Gospel of John (two different Johns by the way) is very straightforward. He is just the messenger, letting folks know that the Messiah is coming. In our world we actually understand this. If the Queen of England was to walk into our church she wouldn’t do so quietly by herself, she would have a royal announcer do that for her. In Jesus’s case, the King of kings and the Lord of lords, He too has a royal announcer. However instead of being dressed in normal royal announcer fashion and being from a high class society, John the Baptist looks exactly like a prophet of old. Makes sense that a prophet would announce God’s coming to humanity.

Matthew 3:3-4 states “For this is the one referred to by Isaiah the prophet when he said, ‘The voice of one crying in the wilderness, make ready the way of the Lord, make His paths straight!’ Now John himself had a garment of camel’s hair and a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey.” When John the Baptist shows up and starts preaching his message that the Savior is coming, it is in a time when God’s people were in sad straights. They were under Roman rule, the Israelite people were heavily taxed and persecuted, and to top it all off there had been no prophets in Israel for four hundred years. In the past when Israel was in trouble the Lord would often send prophets to them to comfort them, guide them, and lead them out of that sad state

they were in. However in Jesus's time there had not been any prophets for many generations, and many were looking for and hoping for that promised Messiah that they had heard about from generation upon generation of Rabbis and Pharisees. They needed God's chosen one. Then all of a sudden John the Baptist shows up wearing garb that would be befitting a prophet (sackcloth and leather belts are mourning clothes often worn by prophets in scripture, think Isaiah), eating locusts and wild honey (food of a wandering man, someone who is set outside the norm), and being uncleaned and unshaven like a Nazarite. (Think Sampson or the prophet Samuel, who lived a certain way apart from others... or maybe consider a modern day monk.) Above all though John the Baptist's message and testimony is what is most strikingly prophet like. It is what drove people from all around Judea to come down and visit him to be baptized and hear about what was coming next. As that royal messenger John the Baptist's message was about repentance of sins and the coming of Jesus.

John 1:19-20 reads "This is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent to him priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, 'Who are you?' And he confessed and did not deny, but confessed, 'I am not the Christ.'" John's message of repentance clearly struck a chord with the people, both the Pharisees and the regular folks. Because John looked like a prophet, spoke like a prophet, and acted like a prophet, they wondered if he might be the promised Messiah. The Messiah that they expected would lead them out of Roman rule, establish Israel as a great kingdom once more, and be God's emissary amongst them. Thinking John might be that guy, the who surrounding countryside came out to see and hear what this maybe Messiah might say. But of course John is just the messenger.

As John shows, what they expected was not what they got. We in our day know that they didn't get an earthly kingdom, but a heavenly one.

They didn't get some great human prophet or emissary... they got God in human flesh Himself. This is why John in answering their questions about who he was and what he was preaching replied in verses 26-27 "John answered them saying, 'I baptize in water, but among you stands One whom you do not know. It is He who comes after me, the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.'" John the Baptist was a great man who did much for God's kingdom, but ultimately he was just the messenger announcing Christ's arrival. When he finally sees Christ for himself, he then testifies to exactly who Jesus is.

Verse 29 read "The next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said, 'Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!'" The phrase "Lamb of God" is often used to talk about Jesus, especially in the Gospel of John. Where it comes from and what it is referring to is the Passover Lamb. If you know the story of Moses leading the Israelites out of captivity you may remember the ten plagues of Egypt, and how the last plague was God stretched out His hand and killed all the firstborn who were not marked. The way the Israelites marked themselves was by taking a perfect and spotless lamb, sacrificing it, and placing its blood upon the wooden doorpost beams of the house. They would eat the lamb inside somberly, recognizing that it is by the lamb's sacrifice that they were made clean from their sins. If you want to think about how Jesus is the lamb, recognize that it is by His blood that we are cleaned. His blood was shed upon two wooden beams nailed together in a cross. When we partake in Holy Communion we remember the words He shared at the Last Supper saying "Take and eat, this is My body which is broken for you, do this in remembrance of Me." Ultimately the whole Gospel of John wants us to recognize two things, both of which are proclaimed by John the Baptist. The first thing is that Jesus is the Lamb of God, the one who takes away the sins of the world. The second is that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, that Jesus is God in human flesh.

In John 1:34 John the Baptist exclaims and testifies who Jesus really is. "I myself have seen, and have testified that this is the Son of God."

John's testimony that Jesus is the Son of God is a clear indication that he recognized who Jesus really is. He recognized that Jesus is fully God and fully man, that the Lord Himself had come to dwell among us. If you put this together with his first testimony, that Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, what we should understand is that God Himself in human flesh came to take away our sins by His death.

Beloved Congregation, we talk about the core of our faith all the time that Jesus came and died for our sins. We often take it for granted that Jesus was God in human flesh. But these are no small things. God loved, and loves, us enough to actually die for us. To bring this into our world, I want to speak frankly with you on what is a sobering Sunday for our town. This last week a young girl took her life in our community. It is an absolute tragedy that this young lady took her life. Without speculating on what prompted it, we should recognize that there are issues in this world for us with mental health and self-worth. If we are honest many among us probably struggle with mental health or have family or friends or coworkers who struggle with their own worth. To connect the story of John the Baptist, Jesus our Messiah, and us today, we should recognize that the Lord has valued us very highly. What anything in this world is worth is determined by what someone is willing to pay for it. What something is worth to me might not be the same as what it is worth to you, but I think we can all agree that the ultimate decider for worth would have to be the Lord who created us. Do you recognize what we are worth to Him? We are worth not only the Lord becoming flesh, which is already humiliating, not only worth living in humble means as Jesus did for His entire life, but we are worth His death in His eyes. By the glory and mercy of the Lord, He came and dwelt among us, lived that perfect life that we could not, and was the

sacrificial lamb. This is why the announcement of God in human flesh is so important. This is why the testimony of John the Baptist is still relevant for us today. It is a reminder that our Savior values us. “Who” we talk about all the time is not some distant God who cares little for us. Rather our Lord valued us enough to come and walk among us and die for us. Rest assured Beloved Congregation, by the love of God the Lamb who takes away the sins of the world and God in human flesh cares for you. As we prepare to take communion today let us remember the sacrifice of our Lord, and also the love that He showed us through His Son Jesus Christ. Let us pray.

Closing Prayer