

**Third Sunday of Advent B  
Incarnation Lutheran Church**

**IDENTITY**

**MY MOM TOLD ME THAT THE OLDER YOU GET, THE FASTER TIME FLIES. I'VE FOUND THAT TO BE TRUE IN MANY AREAS OF MY LIFE, AND FOR SOME REASON, I'VE FOUND THAT TO BE ESPECIALLY TRUE THIS ADVENT SEASON. IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE THAT WE ARE AT THE THIRD OF THE FOUR SUNDAYS IN ADVENT – BUT HERE WE ARE! IT'S BEEN A GOOD ADVENT SEASON FOR ME FOR SOME REASON, PERHAPS BECAUSE THE GOSPEL TEXTS FOR EACH SUNDAY HAVE LIFTED UP A SPECIFIC THEME WORD. THE FIRST WEEK THE WORD WAS “FAITHFULNESS.” WE PONDERED HOW IT IS THAT WE REMAIN FAITHFUL TO GOD WHILE WE WAIT FOR THE COMING OF THE LORD JESUS AND HOW IT IS THAT GOD REMAINS FAITHFUL TO US IN THAT MEANTIME AS WELL. LAST WEEK THE WORD WAS “REPENTANCE.” JOHN THE BAPTIST APPEARED ON THE SCENE, PROCLAIMING A BAPTISM OF REPENTANCE FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS SO THAT THE WAY MAY BE PREPARED FOR THE COMING OF THE MESSIAH. AND NOW TODAY, JOHN IS BACK AGAIN, BUT THIS TIME IN VERY DIFFERENT ROLE AND IT'S HIS NEW ROLE THAT BRINGS US THE THEME WORD FOR TODAY – “IDENTITY” – FOR YOU SEE, IN TODAY'S GOSPEL JOHN'S**

**PRIMARY ROLE IS NOT THAT OF PREACHER OF REPENTANCE BUT RATHER AS WITNESS – WITNESS TO WHO JESUS IS, AND WHO HE, JOHN, IS NOT.**

**TODAY’S GOSPEL COMES TO US NOT FROM MARK, AS LAST WEEK, BUT FROM THE GOSPEL OF JOHN... SO A LITTLE CONTEXTUAL HISTORY HERE MIGHT HELP. THE GOSPEL OF JOHN WAS WRITTEN SOME 50 YEARS – MORE OR LESS- AFTER THE CRUCIFIXION AND RESURRECTION OF JESUS AND THE DEBATE WAS STILL GOING ON AS TO THE TRUE IDENTITY OF BOTH JESUS AND JOHN. THERE EVEN WAS A SCHOOL OF THOUGHT THAT JOHN HIMSELF WAS THE MESSIAH, SO IT WAS IMPORTANT – FOR BOTH THE AUTHOR OF THE GOSPEL OF JOHN AND FOR JOHN HIMSELF – TO BE VERY CLEAR ABOUT THOSE TWO IDENTITIES. AND THE AUTHOR OF JOHN’S GOSPEL DOES JUST THAT. HIS VERY FIRST WORDS ARE A BOLD PROCLAMATION OF WHO JESUS IS. “IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE WORD, AND THE WORD WAS WITH GOD, AND THE WORD WAS GOD...” AND THEN IMMEDIATELY AFTER DECLARING JESUS AS THE WORD, THE LIGHT COMING INTO THE WORLD, THE AUTHOR THEN JUST AS BOLDLY DECLARES WHO JOHN IS. “THERE WAS A MAN SENT FROM GOD, WHOSE NAME WAS JOHN. HE**

**CAME AS A WITNESS TO TESTIFY TO THE LIGHT...HE HIMSELF WAS NOT THE LIGHT...BUT HE CAME TO TESTIFY TO THE LIGHT."**

**AND THAT, THEN, IS WHERE TODAY'S GOSPEL TEXT PICKS UP. THE RELIGIOUS HIERACHY OF THE DAY, OBVIOUSLY AWARE OF JOHN'S PREACHING AND BAPTIZING, ARE BOTH CURIOUS AND SUSPICIOUS. JUST WHO IS JOHN? IS HE A THREAT TO THE STATUS QUO? TO THEIR POWER? TO THE ESTABLISHED INSTITUTION OF RELIGION? AND SO PRIESTS AND LEVITES ARE SENT OUT INTO THE DESERT TO QUESTION JOHN. NOT ONCE, BUT FOUR TIMES, THEY ASK HIM WHO HE IS. ARE YOU THE MESSIAH? ELIJAH? THE PROPHET? THEN WHO? AND JOHN ANSWERS, "I AM NOT THE MESSIAH." "I AM THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING OUT IN THE WILDERNESS, MAKE STRAIGHT THE WAY OF THE LORD." JOHN, YOU SEE, HAD THE TWO IDENTITIES DOWN PAT. . HE KNEW HE WAS NOT THE MESSIAH. HE KNEW THAT JESUS WAS THE MESSIAH, THE ONE SENT TO DO FOR HUMANKIND WHAT WE CANNOT DO FOR OURSELVES. HE KNEW THAT. AND HE ALSO KNEW WHO HE WAS - THE MESSENGER OF THAT GOOD NEWS. HE WAS THE ONE SENT TO WITNESS TO THE MESSIAH'S COMING.**

**AND ISNT THAT WHERE WE FIND OURSELVES THIS DAY AS WELL? AREN'T WE MIGHTILY CHALLENGED IN THIS 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY**

**SKEPTICAL NORTH AMERICAN CULTURE IN WHICH WE LIVE TO KNOW BOTH WHO JESUS IS AND WHO WE ARE AND WHO WE ARE NOT?**

**I GOT TO THINKING THIS WEEK OF ALL THE WORDS THAT IDENTIFY WHO I AM. DAUGHTER, SISTER, WIFE, MOM, GRANDMOTHER, FRIEND, TEACHER, PASTOR. AND IT'S TRUE – ALL THOSE WORDS AND MORE – SHAPE MY IDENTITY – SHAPE WHO I AM AND HOW I BEHAVE. BUT I HAVE A CONFESSION TO MAKE. THE MOST IMPORTANT WORDS THAT DEFINE WHO I AM DIDN'T MAKE THAT INITIAL LIST. OF ALL THE THINGS THAT I, I AM MOST IMPORTANTLY A BAPTIZED CHILD OF GOD. BAPTIZED IN THOSE WATERS, SEALED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT, MARKED WITH THE CROSS OF CHRIST FOREVER. NOTHING DEFINES ME MORE CLEARLY. CHILD OF GOD. NAMED, CLAIMED, REDEEMED, AND EMPOWERED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT TO BE ALL THOSE OTHER THINGS – TO LIVE A LIFE THAT REFLECTS WHO I KNOW JESUS TO BE – THE MESSIAH, THE ONE COMING INTO THE WORLD, THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD, THE REDEEMER AND SAVIOUR OF ALL HUMANKIND...MY LORD AND MY GOD. BUT, I DIDN'T REMEMBER TO PUT THAT IDENTIFICATION FIRST. WOW, WHAT A STRUGGLE. – NOT EASY TO REMEMBER WHOSE AND WHO I AM – SO EASY TO LET ALL THOSE OTHER WORDS SHAPE MY IDENTITY. BUT STRUGGLE I MUST BECAUSE**

**REMEMBERING THAT I AM A BAPTIZED CHILD OF GOD DETERMINES HOW I SEE MYSELF, HOW I SEE OTHERS AND HOW I LIVE IN RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD AND OTHERS.**

**AND SO, THIS DAY, THIS THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT I INVITE YOU INTO THAT SAME STRUGGLE. I INVITE YOU TO NAME THOSE THINGS THAT DEFINE YOUR IDENTITY AND PONDER WHAT OR WHO IT IS THAT SHAPES YOU. AND MOST IMPORTANTLY OF ALL, I INVITE YOU TO REMEMBER, IN THE MIDST OF YOUR STRUGGLE, THAT YOU, TOO, ARE A BAPTIZED CHILD OF GOD.**

**I FOUND THIS BIRTHDAY CARD AT THE STORE THE OTHER DAY. I HAVEN'T YET DECIDED WHO TO SEND IT TO – BUT IT READS LIKE THIS: “ONCE UPON A TIME, A VERY SPECIAL PERSON WAS BORN WHO WAS DESTINED TO CHANGE THE WORLD...” AND ON THE INSIDE...”CALM DOWN, IT’S NOT YOU. IT’S JESUS.”**

**LET’S ALL GO AND WORK ON GETTING OUR IDENTITIES STRAIGHT. AMEN.**