

Who Are You?

If someone, who did not know you, asked you the question: *"Who are you?"*, how would you respond? How would you define yourself? I am certain that there would be a common thread that would be found in those answers. We define ourselves in terms of performance. We define ourselves on the basis of our jobs – *"I work for x, y or z company."* We define ourselves on the basis of the choices that we made for our families. *"I am a husband, I am a father, I am a grandfather, etc."* We define ourselves on the basis of where we go to church. *"I go to St. Paul's Lutheran," "I attend this church or that church."* Everything in our lives involves some kind of *"doing."* We get to define our identity. We decide who we want to be. Our self-worth is measured by our standards. What happens? When we live up to those standards and expectations, we feel great. When we don't, we feel like a failure. We feel terrible about ourselves. Therefore, we need a different definition for ourselves. This morning, as we look at John the Baptist, God answers that question for us: ***"Who are you?"*** 1. *We'll see that it is not about us; It's all about Jesus.*

Who is this John the Baptist? In many ways, we know very little of him. His father was a priest. His parents were far beyond normal age of child bearing when God answered their prayer of having a child. That child would grow up to preach a message of repentance in the wilderness. We really know nothing between the birth of John and his preaching in the wilderness.

Even though God has chosen to tell us very little about John himself, we know what his message was. ***"There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe."*** Even though John held no formal position in the church of that day, he had become the leading religious authority of that day. Thousands of people were going out into the wilderness to hear him preach. Yet, everything about John said that his ministry was not about him. Look at how this man lived. He wore clothes made of camel hair and ate bugs and honey for lunch. In fact, he preached out in the wilderness by a river. Everything about John said that it was not about him. Everything!

But the religious leaders of that day became upset because they thought that everything was all about them. People were flocking out to see this "new" preacher in the wilderness. He was destroying everything for them. They felt like they had lost control of the people. People were leaving them to go and see John. So, they began to think: *This guy has got to go.* So, they sent some people out to interrogate John. ***"Now this was John's testimony when the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, "I am not the Messiah." They asked him, "Then who are you?"*** John was not the Messiah. His ministry was not about him.

So, who was John? He tells them: I'm not the Messiah. I am the one that Isaiah had spoken about last week in our first reading. I am the ***"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."*** John's mission was simple -- point people away from him and to the Messiah that is about to come on the scene. His answer to the question of "who are you" is simple. I'm the one pointing people to the Messiah. This is not about me, but it is about Jesus.

This Messiah was coming to do it all. He was coming to do a construction job that would be impossible for anyone to do. God was sending his prophet out so that God could do some serious road construction in people's hearts. With His Word he would fill in the valleys of sin in our hearts. He would straighten out all those crooked thoughts in our minds. He would knock down the mountains of pride. You see, by nature, the road from God into our hearts is impassable. So, God needs to straighten it out. How? He reminds us that it is not about us. It's all about Jesus.

Through the water of baptism, our sins are washed away. We saw that once again this morning. The other week, we went back and counted the number of baptisms that have happened here at St. Paul's since 2012 is approaching 100. It is amazing how Jesus is changing hearts. Through His Word God keeps filling in those valleys and knocking down the mountains of sin. Yet, we need to remember that it is all about Jesus.

It is an amazing thing that God remembers our sins no more through faith in Jesus. Jesus comes to do what is impossible for us to do. He shines his light into all those dark corners of our hearts. He forgives us day after day. God doesn't see us as we should look to him. Instead he sees us the perfect life and death of Jesus.

If Jesus had come down to earth and said that if you want great blessings, follow me; imitate me; summon up all your strength; live your life like mine, then all we would have is another performance identity. That isn't what God tells us. He tells us that He has performed FOR us. It is his performance that is the basis for restoring our relationship with him. He is the One who will fill the valleys and knock down the mountains. Jesus is the one who will prepare our hearts for both his arrival at Christmas and at the end of time.

Who are you? I am a redeemed child of Christ. I have received the most incredible gift from God. I do NOTHING for it. It comes from a God who loves us dearly. As we prepare for Christ's coming next week, may the Lord remind each of us of what Christ-child brings to this world. It's not about me. It's all about Jesus. Amen.