



FIRST (SCOTS) SERMON

“The Road to Redemption”

Scripture Lessons: *Isaiah 42:1-9; Mark 1:9-13*

*This sermon was preached by The Rev. Dr. L. Holton Siegling, Jr.
on February 18, 2024, at First (Scots) Presbyterian Church
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Isaiah 42: 1-9

The Servant, a Light to the Nations

42 Here is my servant, whom I uphold,
my chosen, in whom my soul delights;
I have put my spirit upon him;
he will bring forth justice to the nations.

² He will not cry out or lift up his voice
or make it heard in the street;

³ a bruised reed he will not break,
and a dimly burning wick he will not quench;
he will faithfully bring forth justice.

⁴ He will not grow faint or be crushed
until he has established justice in the earth,
and the coastlands wait for his teaching.

⁵ Thus says God, the LORD,
who created the heavens and stretched them out,
who spread out the earth and what comes from it,
who gives breath to the people upon it
and spirit to those who walk in it:

⁶ I am the LORD; I have called you in righteousness;
I have taken you by the hand and kept you;
I have given you as a covenant to the people,^[a]
a light to the nations,

⁷ to open the eyes that are blind,
to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon,
from the prison those who sit in darkness.

⁸ I am the LORD; that is my name;
my glory I give to no other,
nor my praise to idols.

⁹ See, the former things have come to pass,
and new things I now declare;
before they spring forth,
I tell you of them.

Mark 1:9-13

The Baptism of Jesus

⁹ In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove upon him. ¹¹ And a voice came from the heavens, "You are my Son, the Beloved;^[a] with you I am well pleased."

The Testing of Jesus

¹² And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. ¹³ He was in the wilderness forty days, tested by Satan, and he was with the wild beasts, and the angels waited on him.

The Road to Redemption

This morning, as the sermon title would suggest, we are going to talk about Jesus' road to redemption. Now, to propose that Jesus' redemptive work on our behalf was somehow akin to a road / a journey, is to also put forward the idea that there was a lot more going on than meets the eye when it comes to Jesus' atoning work on the cross.

If, for example, the cross was all that was needed to save us from our sins, then could not Jesus -- as the second person of the Trinity -- could he not have just miraculously descended from on high, parked his heavenly chariot at Golgotha and nailed himself to that tree?

He could have, but he didn't! Think about it ... had Jesus done that, only God would have been on that cross, but God didn't need to be there -- we did!

Oh, for us to be there, Jesus would do much more than merely die -- he would live. And that life / that journey / that road to redemption, as it were ... it would make all the difference in the world.

In another one of the Gospel accounts, we are told that, upon seeing Jesus, John the Baptizer declares: "Behold, the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" ... In that seemingly simple statement, John acknowledged something very important about who Jesus was and what he came to do.

To begin, to say that Jesus is the Lamb of God is to say that the person and work of Jesus is not a human initiative / it is not of us! No! We affirm and do believe that work of Jesus is none other than the work of God ... that it was by God's design that this sacrificial lamb would lay down his life as an atonement for sin.

The people who had gathered in Bethany beyond the Jordan in order to hear John proclaim a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, upon hearing him talk this way about the Lamb of God -- that would have set their minds to racing!

For starters, it is understandable if not avoidable that they would have heard about this lamb of God and thought about another lamb / the Passover Lamb ... the one that was killed and whose blood was used to mark the doorposts of the Israelite's homes so that they would be spared the wrath of God.

For this gathered people ... I think their minds would have also gone to a particular religious observance ... a sacred day known as the Day of Atonement. They would have recalled anew how it was that on that day, the priest would select two lambs upon which the sins of the people would be laid, and how one of those lambs would be slain and the other would be sent beyond the city limits / out into the wilderness ... as if to send their sins away / to remove them ... expel them!

As these people listened to John, I can't help but think that the words of another prophet echoed in their minds ... those of the Prophet Isaiah, who in chapter 53 of the book that bears his name, described a suffering servant ... a blessed and redemptive gift from God who would serve as a sacrificial lamb led to the slaughter ... that bearing the sins of many, he would make for them an intercession.

In so many ways, what we have gathered here are a people who have long-awaited a promised Messiah, and we have John who has been faithfully preparing the way.

And now, here he is! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world ... the one perfect lamb / spotless / a lamb without blemish!

John had been saying as much all along ... that as powerful as his witness had been, it absolutely paled in comparison to the work of the Messiah who was to come. In fact, Jesus was so great, and John was so insignificant ... that he wasn't even worthy to untie the thong of Jesus' sandal.

With that in mind, we can imagine John's surprise – and perhaps the surprise of the people -- to see Jesus standing there, ready to be baptized, because John's baptism was a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

In Matthew's account it says that "John would have prevented him, saying, 'I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?'"

Friends, this is sometimes overlooked, but it really is one of the one of the keys to understanding the mission of God in Jesus Christ. Jesus didn't need to be baptized because he had sin in his heart as we all do. No! The Bible tells us that Jesus was without sin. In 2 Corinthians 5:21 the Apostle Paul put it this way: "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

And we take good notice of that word "righteousness," because it is no coincidence that when Jesus

responds to John's suggestion that He not be baptized, this is what Jesus says: "Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness."

But what does that mean? What does it mean that Jesus is essentially telling John to trust him and to get on with it; that Jesus' baptism is an essential step along the road to redemption? What does Jesus mean when he asserts that the righteousness of God will not be accomplished in any other way than by his own baptism? What is Jesus saying?

Well, he's obviously saying a lot, but not least of which is that his life, and most notably, his death, is substitutionary. He takes our place. In other words, it is not Jesus' sins that he takes to the cross, he takes our sins!

To put it another way, Adam and Eve, didn't just act as individuals when they sinned against God, they acted on behalf of the whole of humanity. And the result of their sins is our fallen and sinful nature, and we cannot get away from it no matter how hard we try. It's a part of our spiritual DNA!

And the impact of our sinful nature, practically speaking, is that we experience a separation from God that we cannot bridge ourselves. Indeed, that redemption / that reconciliation takes a measure of righteousness that we simply do not have.

And that's where Jesus comes in. For just as sin first came into the world through one man, so too will sin be overcome by THIS man. This one righteous soul, who on behalf of all of us, bridges the gap and creates the condition whereby true communion with God is now possible.

In this way, Jesus not only had to die -- for the wages of sin are death -- but He also had to live, and because His life was lived in complete obedience ... the very fulfillment of all the law and all the prophets ... that debt that we could never pay, Jesus paid it in full!

And the miracle ... the miracle is this: Jesus' righteousness gets transferred to us by faith. It becomes our righteousness! In this way and countless others, Jesus was able to do what we could never do. What's more, he did everything that God asked us to do, including being baptized. Not only that, Jesus faced in His life everything that we would face in ours, including being tempted.

This morning's Lectionary reading from Mark's Gospel lets it be known that Jesus' 40-day wilderness journey was, in fact, filled with temptation. And not unlike that first Adam, Jesus was also confronted by the devil. But where the first Adam failed, Jesus succeeds.

And think about how much harder it must have been for Jesus to resist. For Adam and Eve were in a beautiful garden. Their needs met. They were in love!

But Jesus is all alone. He has been fasting and so he's terribly weak and far far from paradise. That is the wilderness he is in.

Consider how similar the temptations were – the temptations that Adam and Eve faced and the temptations that Jesus faced.

We notice how the devil, in both cases, essentially challenged the word of God. Did God say, "You shall not eat from any tree in the garden?" No, no, no! It is just your eyes will be open! You'll be like God!

And to Jesus he says, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread."

Ah, if you are the son of God! The voice that had resounded from the heavens at the time of Jesus' baptism had already said as much. "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." Jesus need not doubt what God had said!

The other temptations that Jesus will face ...

- Jumping from the temple mount / a test to see if God's Word about not dashing his foot against the stone could be counted upon
- the temptation to bow down to the Devil / just a simple genuflect when God had been nothing but clear that there shall be no other gods before Him!

Isn't it interesting, that the Devil's greatest tool in his perverse toolbox was to try and tempt Jesus not to trust in God's promises / not to believe in what God had said?

Jesus stood firm in the face of his temptations, and we are told that "the angels waited on him."

Oh, in these ways and others Jesus was perfectly faithful throughout his life ... and when the time came and for this Lamb of God to be taken beyond the city limits – out of town and to that hill called Calvary – then his road to redemption was nearly complete.

The Apostle Paul put it this way: "In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us."

In the end, God's redemptive work on the cross required of him a life lived apart from the cross. It started when the Word became flesh and dwelled among us full of grace and truth, and it continued in Jesus' submission to every blessed aspect of the heart and mind of God – oh, even at the end, and when that cup would not pass, even then God's will would be done.

And only when God's complete will was done -- from the beginning to end -- only then do we hear our

Savior say, "It is finished."

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.