

Sermon July 14 2024 “At Home in Christ”

Dear fellow redeemed by, for, and in Christ Jesus, John the Baptist never was at home in this world. He was a stranger. An interloper, a misfit.

His oddness started at birth. He was born miraculously to a couple who could not have children.

He was given the wrong name (in the opinion of all who were there when he was born). Everybody wanted him named Zechariah, after his father. That was the tradition - to name the first-born son after the father. But no. His name would be John.

He didn't wear the clothes everyone else wore. If he was around today, he'd be one of those people little children point at, and parents snicker, thinking, "Really?" A camel's hair shirt with a leather belt around your waist? How gauche!

Then there was his diet. John went primal before it became a fad diet! Locusts and wild honey. YUM!

He preached, not in a synagogue but out in the wilderness. He didn't pander to the crowd - he was a fiery preacher of repentance. And if you were wrong, he didn't care who you were - Pharisee, Sadducee, Scribe, King. He didn't care who he offended, he was literally on a mission from God.

John was like a bizarre visitor from another place and time. The world was not his home, and it never would be.

Do you ever feel like John? Not quite at home in this world? Maybe you wear the wrong clothes, listen to the wrong music, have the wrong friends, or believe differently than others. Perhaps you feel just a little out of step with everyone else . . .

Truth is, Christians do have a little John the Baptist in them because, like John, we have a whole lot of Jesus in us.

We just baptized little Finley McKeel. Though she doesn't know it and likely won't remember it, today is the best day of her life. Cute as she is, she was conceived in sin, but now she's a beloved child of God.

Like John, we, and Finley were miraculously born - born from above by water and the Spirit in Holy Baptism.

Like John, we and she wear different clothes - the robe of righteousness given to you by faith in Christ.

Like John, we and eventually she, eat strange food - the Body and Blood of the Lord in His Supper here.

Like John, our thinking, values, and love are different.

And so, as a Christian, like John, we and Finley are never quite at home in this world and life. Just as the hymn says; we are but strangers here, our citizenship is in heaven. Our lives on earth are but a pilgrimage on the way to a heavenly home.

King Herod, on the other hand, was a man of the world. He lived large. He saw what he wanted and took it.

Even though Herod gets what he wants, he's never satisfied, never at peace. That's the way of sin. It never leaves you satisfied but always wanting more. ***In effect, we're enslaved by wants because we're on a never-ending treadmill of desires.***

Herod found him enslaved by sin on his birthday. He threw a feast for the leading people of the area and a drunken, lustful king made a foolish promise. His angry wife Herodias took advantage of the situation. Herod, who didn't want to disappoint his guests or look out of step with the world, was trapped.

Sin isn't as harmless as it looks. A dancing girl, a little lust, what's the harm? But Herod's not as free as he thinks. He'd swore he'd give her whatever she asked for, and when she demands John's head, he sadly gives the order, and John the Baptist, the greatest prophet in 400 years, is beheaded.

However, though John lost his head, he didn't lose his voice. For even after John is dead and buried, he's still in Herod's head. Herod's got John on the brain. So, when Jesus comes along, Herod thinks ***Yikes! John's back!*** Raised from the dead.

Herod thought so because Herod saw and heard from Jesus the same things he saw and heard from John.

Someone who didn't think like or share the same values as everyone else, one who didn't fear the same things as everyone else. Yes, Jesus was different. Not of this world.

So, John was the perfect forerunner for Jesus, but ***not only for Jesus, also for you. For in Baptism, we too are sanctified, set apart from the world. Yet we often give into the temptations common to humanity.***

Sometimes we play the Herod or the Herodias. We give in to the lusts and temptations and think, *what's the harm?*

We want to please others, and so we say things we later regret and make promises that get us into trouble.

We want others to like us and so do what we shouldn't do.

We get so filled with anger that while we may not go around chopping each other's heads off, we certainly bite them off, chew up our neighbor's reputations, and parade around boasting as if we had their head on a platter.

Yes, what we do to one another can get ugly.

And when you do sin, do you feel good? Are you satisfied? Did you get what you want? Oh, maybe for a moment. But as with Herod, sin never leaves you satisfied.

It just leaves you wanting more. And sooner or later, it always winds up biting and enslaving you.

There's only one way out of that. The way of John. The way of Jesus. The way of repentance and forgiveness.

We confess that we're more like Herod than it's comfortable to admit, and so we listen to John, who, though beheaded 2,000 years ago, is still preaching repentance to us today.

But John didn't just call folks to repent, he also said **behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.**

Behold Jesus on the cross who took your sinful enslavements to the cross, bearing the chains of your sin, to set you free.

For that's what forgiveness is. The word for forgiveness in Greek is the same as being released and set free.

And so forgiveness is to be set free from your sin, from your *slavery* to sin, from the *condemnation* of sin - free to be a child of God. And that is what you and little Finely are. In Christ.

So Jesus went to the cross with your sins clinging to him so he could die and rise because that's what you needed. Sin cannot be defeated any other way. Sin doesn't give up; it has to die.

Again, look at Herod - even when he wanted to do what was right, he couldn't. Herod feared John. He knew John was a righteous and holy man. He heard John gladly.

But in the end, Herod's sins and sinful desires were too much for him. ***Either he had to die or John had to die***, and . . . well . . . you heard how that turned out.

But Jesus, who was not enslaved by sin - made a different choice. Because of our sins, ***either He had to die, or you had to die, and Jesus chose Himself.***

He would die so that you could live. He would take the death sentence to set you free. The Son would become a slave, so that we slaves be sons of God.

And so Jesus, in your place, enters the prison of sin, death, and the grave. He is nailed to a cross for your foolishness, lusts, murder, anger, pride, and hate, yet from the cross he says: **Father, forgive them.** Set them free.

And for Jesus' sake, the Father does. And you are forgiven and free. You see, that's where Jesus surpasses John.

Both gave their life, but while Herod ***thought John*** had risen from the dead, ***Jesus actually did.*** While John's *voice* lived on in Herod's head, Jesus lives now in His same flesh and blood.

This means Jesus didn't just pay for your sins, die your death, and enter your grave; he destroyed them. He broke their hold on you that you be enslaved by sin no more.

That you do not fear death and the grave anymore. But know that in Jesus, as Paul said, you have the guarantee of an inheritance in heaven—the promise of eternal life in Him.

Which means you are a bit strange and out of step with the world. For when you are baptized into Christ, you are a new person, having died and been raised with Christ.

In Baptism, the Holy Spirit begins living in you so that You have one foot in mortality and one foot in immortality.

You are no longer a slave to your sinful nature, but set free to live in the Spirit of God given to you. To possess the things of this world, but not be possessed by them. To live in the world without the world living in you.

That we answer when God calls us. *I'll do it.* I'll serve, I'll forgive, I'll love. You can do so because you have been given so much more and the promise that though you die, you shall live.

Oh, you'll still have your sinful urges. Your flesh will always want to be served and have its sinful appetite satisfied. And you'll give in - you know it, and I know it.

But as often as you do, just as often come and eat and drink the food of forgiveness and life -the true Body and Blood of your Savior Jesus Christ.

Repent, therefore, in the Spirit's power and receive the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Eat this food that strengthens the children of God.

For just as Jesus is greater than John, so this feast is greater than the feasts of our world.

For a while, Herod's feast lasted but for a time and ended in despair; this feast will last forever and gives joy and peace.

John lived - and died - in that confidence and peace. You can too. And if that's a bit strange and weird, so be it.

The day is coming when *all* things will be made new. When what is now hidden will finally be revealed.

And when what now seems strange will be shown to be the way things were meant to be all along. **AMEN**