

Sermon Draft

Text: Luke 7:18–28 (29–35)

Sermon: “Who Are You?”

Last week John was beginning his ministry of preaching repentance for the forgiveness of sins, emphasizing that the “coming one” would bring fiery judgment on those who refused to repent. John’s description of this coming judgment is clearly eschatological, believing that the “coming one” would inaugurate the end times and bring his judgment on deserving people.

Herod is clearly one person deserving such judgment, and yet, not only does he continue to violate the law of God with impunity, but he also has had John imprisoned for publicly condemning Herod’s adulterous marriage to Herodias.

This Third Sunday in Advent we focus on the coming of the Christ through the preparatory ministry of John the Baptist now very near its end. Significantly, in view of John’s situation, in the Old Testament Reading Zephaniah the prophet leads his people to rejoice in the Lord for the salvation he brings.

In his Letter to the Philippians, Paul leads the people of God to rejoice because the ***“Lord is at hand”*** (Philippians 4:4–5). But for John, locked in a dungeon, the message of joy escapes him, and he contemplates whether Jesus is ***“the one who is to come”*** (Luke 7:19).

On this pink-candle Sunday in Advent we focus our attention on the reasons we have to rejoice in the midst of our Christmas preparations.

In our Gospel lesson we have John the Baptist asking Jesus, “Are you the one who is to come?” In other words, “who are you?” This morning I want to ask each of you, “who are you?” “Who am I?”

Our current culture, for all of its technological marvels, flees from a foundational question, namely, what is it to be a human being?

The British author, Jonathan Sacks, has aptly described this reality in a Wall Street Journal article. He maintains that secularism has overlooked a hugely important aspect of humanity: that human beings are, as he says, “meaning-seeking animals.” Providing meaning is something our most familiar secular institutions, those on which we’ve so come to depend, don’t seem to be doing. Science explains how things work but doesn’t say why.

Technology enables us to do amazing things, but it cannot offer wisdom into how that amazing power to build, to harness, should be used for meaningful purpose. The marketplace gives us what seem to be almost unlimited choices these days but not a hint as to which choice has real value. The liberal state tells us we're free to live as we choose, but its very premise means it won't help us know how to choose.

Science, technology, the free market, and the liberal state have led to impressive achievements in discovery, personal autonomy, and comforts. In many ways, they mark great steps forward in history, and we can be very thankful.

But the big questions everyone needs to ask and answer, "Who am I?" "Why am I here?" "How then shall I live?" here they come up empty (Jonathan Sacks, "Swords into Plowshares," Wall Street Journal, October 3/4, 2015, C1).

Who are you? That is a necessary question? How we answer it defines our core identity and shapes our life and activities. And yet, answering that question, "Who are you?" is not necessarily so easy.

We know who we are often told we are, according to other people. Many come to us with a variety of answers. A popular answer among many elites and multiple segments of society is that you are but a moment in an evolutionary process that's utterly capricious and without purpose. Another view is that we are defined by what we acquire, namely, our possessions and wealth. "Shop 'til you drop" or "He who dies with the most toys wins" captures this sentiment.

Yet another voice suggests understanding ourselves in terms of entertainment and pleasure. Finally, not a few people are drawn to power and prestige as the heart and soul of their lives. Who of us hasn't felt the influence of some of these answers to the question, "Who am I?"

What they have in common is an absence of God! To the extent that we adopt one of those answers, we are imitating and following Adam and Eve in their effort to become their own masters and be "like God" (Genesis 3:5–6).

Luther called this foundational sin "incurvatus se", that is, "turning in upon one's self."

All of those answers are not only false; they are also reductionistic and view humans as mere material, “here today and gone tomorrow.” Here is the wonderful truth about who you are. **“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them”** (Genesis 1:27). **“The Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature”** (Genesis 2:7).

Without any merit or worthiness on our part, God created us in his image and positioned us as the very apex of his creative labors. Our identity is a gift! We are made for fellowship with God, the Blessed and Holy Trinity! And this priceless gift of identity is restored to us by the one who is **“the one to come”** (v 19).

John the Baptist’s question about Jesus’ identity, “Are you the one?” is crucial for every human being. Jesus points to his actions as proof of his identity. **“Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them”** (v 22).

These actions fulfilled Isaiah's prophecies (29:18; 35:5–6) of God's future deliverance in the Messiah.

Jesus' identity fulfilled the promises of a saving deliverer the seed of the woman (Genesis 3:15), the seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the seed of David (Matthew 1:1) dying, rising, crushing Satan. God gives us our new and wonderful identity in the identity of Jesus. As Jesus says: ***"Blessed is the one who is not offended by me"*** (v 23).

Who we are is dependent on our relationship with Christ. I wouldn't want to know me without Jesus in my life. You are who you are, Christ's, in the gift of your Baptism (Romans 6:3–4). You know who you are, Christ's, by the gift of his living voice through his prophets and apostles (John 8:31–32). You taste who you are, Christ's, in the gift of his true body and blood in his Supper.

The better question for us this morning is who are we are in Christ. We are Christ's redeemed who have been given the gift of eternal life in him (John 6:40; 10:27–28). By faith in Jesus, trusting Him in His true identity, we receive our true identity as God's forgiven children.

If you ask who you are in Christ, there are over a hundred Bible passages. In closing this morning let me share a few. ***“You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”*** (1 Peter 2:9)

“I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” (Galatians 2:20)

“For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.” (Galatians 3:26)

“Even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved.” (Ephesians 2:5)

“And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” (Galatians 4:6)

Who are you? In and through our Lord and Savior you are God’s child joined to Jesus’ atoning, saving death and his resurrection life.

Amen