

We may not know who this John is, but he sure knows himself! John, whom we also know as “John the Baptist” seems so self-assured and confident when asked, “Who are you?” He is John: not the Messiah, but one who prepares the way for him. Not the prophet, but the voice crying out in the wilderness. Not the light, but a witness to testify to the light. John can even describe himself in terms of *God’s word*: “I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ as *the prophet Isaiah said*.”

Boy, is it hard to be like John. For how do we answer the question, “Who are you?” Our answer can depend on any number of factors: where we are; who’s around us; who’s asking. On top of that, we all have our insecurities. Parts of identities we’re unsure about. Roles we don’t like but feel we should play. And do we pause to consider who we are in terms of God’s word? How many of us could or would answer the question, “Who are you?” with a scripture passage?

Yes, it’s difficult to answer, “Who are you?” not only for an individual; but also for congregations. Because churches struggle with their identity and role in God’s word’s too. We know our church’s name and our denomination, but when it comes to defining our mission--“who we are” in the fabric of Christ’s church--we’re far less successful.

One way churches define “who they are” is with a mission statement. Lutheran Church of Our Saviour’s most current mission statement says that we are “a vibrant assembly of God’s people united in worship and study, forming faithful disciples in mission to Chesterfield County and to the world.” But what if the Pharisees were to come to us and give us the same barrage of questions they gave John? Can we say how we are united in worship and study? Can we identify why being united in worship and study makes it possible to share the gospel in Chesterfield County? If someone asked us to define how our mission works in our lives and ministry could we answer? What Scripture passage would we use to describe or explain ourselves?

Yes, in the face of question “Who are you?” it’s all too easy for the average mainline congregation, riddled with all the insecurities the church of 2017 faces, to come up short with an answer.

So who do we find a solution? Perhaps confident John can help. Because John is entirely consistent with what God sent him out to do. Jesus tells people that nobody fulfilled his or her purpose better than John. (In Matthew 11, Jesus says, “among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist.”) God called John to prepare the way of the Lord, and what John did *MATCHED* with these initial marching orders from God. John is entirely consistent with what God sent him out to do.

We, on the other hand, are not consistent like John. We struggle to know *who we are* personally or congregationally. We go astray from our initial marching orders. We spend time with ministries we *like* to do or ministries that we have *always done* or ministries that we have because other churches have them but which are not what God is calling us to do. And as a result our ministry doesn’t match the marching orders we receive from God.

In other words, who we are doesn't match whom God made us to be.

So we need to return, constantly, back to our marching orders from God. We need to return, again and again, to WHO WE ARE. We need to remember, over and over, our baptismal identity.

Baptism gives us our identity as Children of God, belonging to Christ, with the spirit of wisdom and understanding and counsel and might and knowledge and fear of the Lord. Baptism says that we are a people sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever.

And baptism gives us our marching orders: to proclaim Christ in word AND deed, to care for others and the world God made, and to work for justice and peace.

For baptism helps us match up
who we are and whom God calls us to be.

So how fitting, it seems, that we spend two Sundays this Advent listening to John the Baptist and meditating on John's baptismal ministry. For as we prepare for the Word of God made flesh, we must take time to (re)consider who we are as the baptized people of God and to consider how to prepare our lives and ministry to be whom God has baptized us to be.

For the one who called and calls us through baptism is faithful and will be with us no matter how unsure we may be of ourselves. The one who called and calls us through baptism is faithful, no matter if, unlike John, we can't yet answer who we are. In that, we rejoice always.
AMEN.

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Lutheran Church of Our Saviour
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December 10, 2017
Third Sunday of Advent (Observed)
Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11
Psalm 126
1 Thessalonians 5:16-24
John 1:6-8, 19-28