

Rorate Coeli

22 December, Anno Domini 2024

St. John 1:19-28

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Children of God,

“Who are you,” the priests and Levites demanded of the one who had come to be known as The Baptizer. They were trying to figure out if they should hitch their wagon to John’s star. And John didn’t shy away from answering. He was more than happy to confess, but not what they wanted. Maybe they had come looking for the Christ, maybe not. But they should have. Their question should have been “Who is the Christ? Where is He? Can you point Him out to us?” That’s the question that John, and every faithful messenger appointed by God, is always more than ready and happy to answer.

John wasn’t the Christ. He wasn’t Elijah. He wasn’t the prophet like Moses. And John was more than happy to confess that. John is interested in only one thing, pointing to the one who is the Christ. Therein lies the reason that St. Paul can say, while he’s sitting in prison, “Rejoice!” There IS a Christ! There IS one anointed by God to bear your sins. There IS the prophet like Moses who speaks God’s Word so that you can hear what God would say to you. In many and various ways God spoke to His people of old by the prophets, but now, in these last days, God has spoken to us, to you, by His Son, Jesus, the Christ. He, Jesus, is the Christ. He is the one who pours out the Spirit of truth and comfort in the preaching of His Word and the cleansing waters of Holy Baptism. He is the one who has drained all the venom of Satan’s fangs by allowing them to sink deep into His own innocent flesh.

That’s all that John cared about - pointing us to Jesus. John didn’t matter. He didn’t say “I am John, the son of Zechariah and Elizabeth.” He considered himself

of no consequence because, as blessed as he was to be the forerunner of the Messiah, the forerunner is nothing, less than a slave, in comparison to the Messiah, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the whole world and restores mankind to God. John only matters because Jesus, the Christ, matters and because God appointed John to point you to Jesus. That's who John is, a voice pointing you to Jesus who is the Christ and away from himself, because he is not the Christ.

Who are you? How do you define yourself when asked? My guess is that you don't start with "I am not the Christ." More than likely you speak about who your family is, your line of work, your interests, and what you've done that you're most proud of. Maybe you even very piously say "I'm a sinner." But none of those things is who you really are. When our Lord returns on the Last Day, He's not going to ask about those things. You won't be saved by your lineage or your business savvy or how many friends you have on Facebook. Those things are secondary at best.

So who are you? Let's consider first who you WERE. You WERE a lost and condemned person. You WERE born of sinful parents who were so kind as to share with you their sinful flesh. From the moment you were conceived you WERE sold into slavery to sin. You WERE ruled by hell's tyrant and your flesh gladly paid homage. You sat at your master's table and gorged yourself on works of darkness - bitterness, division, deceit, greed, lust, and pride. You despised mercy and love and forgiveness. You WERE obsessed with what others thought of you willingly sacrificed anything and anyone to gain men's approval. You WERE a blind, dead enemy of God who hated His Word. You WERE part of the countless throng marching on the broad road that leads to eternal destruction.

Scripture clearly tells us that that is exactly who we all once WERE. But the Lord has looked upon your wretched state and acted exactly according to who He WAS, IS, and always WILL BE. He IS the one who wondrously knit you together in your mother's womb. He IS the one who knew and numbered all your days before you had seen a single one of them. He IS the one who has numbered the very hairs on your head. He IS the one who gives daily bread to everyone, even to all evil

people. He IS the one who wasn't content to watch you destroy yourself for all eternity. He IS the one who loved sinners so that He would rather bear the righteous punishment of your sin Himself rather than leave you in Satan's prison. He IS the one who didn't spare His only Son but gave Him up for you to redeem you from slavery and death and to give you instead freedom, life, and an eternal kingdom. He IS the Lord who is at hand to save you. He IS the God who gives you His Holy Spirit so that you might no longer walk in darkness, serving the perverse and selfish desires of the flesh but instead walk according to the Spirit, dying to yourself, spilling out your life, even to the point of death, that others might know who the Christ IS because He IS their Christ just as He is yours.

Now, I ask you again, who are you? You are NOT the Christ, but you do bear His Name. You ARE a Christian. Your parents gave you a name that legally identifies you. But, your heavenly Father gave you a name on the day you were given the new, eternal birth of water and the Spirit. He gave you nothing less than His Name. On that day you were given the name of the blessed and Holy Trinity. How great is this Name? Every time we pray the highest of prayers, the truest prayer, the prayer that orders and informs all other prayers, we are taught that our first concern is to be glory and honor of God's Name above all other names. Now, of course, having this Name doesn't make you God. But you are a dearly beloved adopted child of God. As a bearer of this Name you are a beneficiary of all that God is and does. You ARE an heir of His kingdom, a kingdom of mercy and peace and righteousness which comes to you in Christ.

You are NOT indebted to Satan any longer. You are NOT a slave to your flesh, having to gratify its desires and bend to its will. You are NOT your sins, your addiction, your failures, your illness, your pain, your depression, your anxiety, your struggles. You are NOT the mess of your life, your disheveled house, your wardrobe, your job, or your family. You ARE baptized. You ARE joined to Jesus. What is yours is His and what is His is yours. He has laid full claim on your sin and your death. In exchange, you have been given His holiness, His life, His mercy, His forgiveness, His peace, His family. You ARE a child of the light. You have been given a seat at the King's table where He who truly is the greatest

in the kingdom of heaven makes Himself your servant and feeds you with His own Body and Blood for the forgiveness of all your sins, a pledge of who He has made you, who you ARE!

Dearly beloved, that is who you are. You are Christ's. No other name or description matters. You are not the Christ but there is a Christ and you belong to Him. And you belong to Him not because of anything you have done but because of everything He has done for you. Remember who you are, who Christ has made you, every day. Make the sign of the holy cross as you speak your family name - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - and remember that you have been redeemed and given a new name by Christ the crucified. Set aside your vain desires for pleasure and glory and honor among men. They are nothing. Christ is everything and He has come down from heaven to share His everything with you and to make you His own.

In the Name of +Jesus.

Pastor Ulmer

(We stand.) The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus our Lord.