

**Sermon for
Red Letter Challenge
✠ Being ✠**

Date: March 1, 2020

Location: St. John's Lutheran Church, Austin, MN

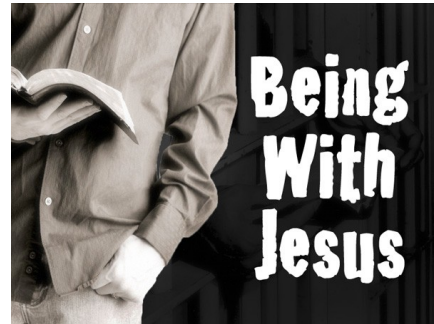
Old Testament: Isaiah 35:1-10

Epistle Reading: James 5:7-11

Gospel Reading: Matthew 11:2-15

Sermon Text: Matthew 11:2-15

Sermon Title: Red Letter Challenge: Being



Hymns:

LSB 579 – The Law of God is Good and Wise

LSB 578 – Thy Strong Word

LSB 569 – In Adam We Have all Been One

LSB 582 – God's Word is our Great Heritage (Tune 657) (*offertory*)

LSB 422 – On My Heart Imprint Your Image

LSB 418 – O Lord, Throughout These Forty Days

Distribution:

W&P #111 – One Bread One Body

CW – Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus

LSB 587 – I Know My Faith is Founded

Liturgy:

Divine Service: Creative Worship w/ excerpts from D.S. I



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Text: Matthew 11:2-15

When John was in prison, he heard about the things Christ had done. So he sent his disciples to ask Jesus, “Are you the one who is coming or should we look for someone else?”

Jesus answered John’s disciples, “Go back and tell John what you hear and see. Blind people see again, lame people are walking, those with skin diseases are made clean, deaf people hear again, dead people are brought back to life, and poor people hear the Good News. Whoever does not lose his faith in me is indeed blessed.”

As they were leaving Jesus spoke to the crowds about John. “What did you go into the desert to see? Tall grass swaying in the wind? Really, what did you go to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? Those who wear fine clothes are in royal palaces. Really, what did you go to see? A prophet? Let me tell you that he is far more than a prophet. John is the one about whom Scripture says, ‘I’m sending my messenger ahead of you to prepare the way in front of you.’

“I can guarantee this truth: Of all the people ever born, no one is greater than John the Baptizer. Yet the least important person in the kingdom of heaven is greater than John. From the time of John the Baptizer until now the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful people have been seizing it. All the Prophets and Moses’ Teachings prophesied up to the time of John. If you are willing to accept their message John is the Elijah who was to come. Let the person who has ears listen!

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Grace to you, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Being. This week in the Red Letter Challenge you are going to read about "Being."

Being with Jesus.
Walking with Him.
Learning from Him.
Sitting at His feet.

This week is also about Jesus being with us.

Calming the storms of life.
Feeding us in His Holy Supper.
Filling us with the Holy Spirit.
Never leaving us alone.

This week is also about being with each other.

Coming together.
Holding each other up.
Supporting each other.
Standing together against Satan.

Jesus is our mighty fortress. It is in His Church¹ that we:

Seek the Lord where He may be found,
and call on Him while He is near.²

It is here that Jesus comes to us through His Holy Word,³ through His Holy Baptism,⁴ and through His Holy Supper.⁵ Here is where He comes near. We are, right now, at this very moment, on the mountain top,⁶ sitting at Jesus' feet,⁷ being with Him, being taught by Him.⁸

Being with Jesus. It should change us. It should affect us. As we learn from Him we should reflect Him, to all who encounter us. The time of Lent is a time of reflection, repentance, and renewal. Our Sunday sermons are going to make us feel a little uncomfortable at times, because we must look at our sin.⁹ We must turn on

1 1 Corinthians 12:27

2 Isaiah 55:6

3 Isaiah 55:10-11

4 Matthew 28:18-20

5 John 6:53-58

6 Matthew 17:1-5

7 Luke 10:39

8 Mark 6:34

9 John 3:20-21

the light, the Light of the World – Jesus Christ, to expose those sins. It is in the Light that sins shrivel and die.¹⁰

Last Sunday we looked at the Christian Church in America and ourselves here at St. John's, and we dragged out some sin. We put it on display. It made us feel uncomfortable. That's what real, honest, genuine repentance looks like, for those who repent. That is how we should feel every time we come into the presence of a Holy God.

We should fear Him because He is Holy.¹¹ When we approach the throne of Almighty God we know our sins are chained to us, the stains are permanent, we cannot wash them off, we can't cover them up. We come dirty, decrepit and disgusting. We don't want God or anyone else to see our sin, but if we don't drag our sins before God's throne we will never be rid of them.

Last week we mentioned the trials this congregation has been through in the few years before I came here. That time was filled with strife for various reasons. Some of those were the fault of individuals sitting here. Some of that was because others tried to deal with that strife in un-Christian ways. Some of it maybe was no one's particular fault, but it compounded the situation none the less.

Church, this church, St. John's in Austin, MN is supposed to be an anchor. It is supposed to be a place you can depend on, rely on. It is supposed to be a place where you can come and sit, being with Jesus. It is supposed to be a safe haven. It wasn't. When that happens, when the anchor breaks free and the storm comes, people react. They try to find an anchor. To often it is the wrong one.

Here, like other churches, some grabbed onto their pet projects. Whatever that part of St. John's is. Wherever they serve, or help, or work. They grabbed onto it and held on to it tightly. They tried to protect it. They forgot something. Jesus protect us. We don't protect Him. That is why:

We have lost our mission.
We have lost our purpose.
We've lost our reason for being.

When you were in the process of Calling a new pastor, my name some how got on your list. I don't really know how. You narrowed down that list and I ended up on the short list. The list of shepherds you would talk to about coming here to lead you in the way of peace,¹² to shepherd you and guide you in your faith. To grow this flock and watch it prosper. Then you issued a Divine Call to me.

10 John 1:5
11 1 Peter 1:16
12 Luke 1:79

One person was calling me before I had accepted the Call. They were calling me secretly, claiming to represent the Call Committee to tell me things, to manipulate me, to control this congregation by controlling what I heard. I almost rejected the Call outright because of that, but God wouldn't let me sleep. He kept nagging me about St. John's in Austin. God convinced me to come here. He didn't tell me why. He didn't tell me what was happening here. He did not tell me what was in-store for me. He did make it clear I was to move, difficult as that was for my precious beautiful bride.

Manipulating, plotting and scheming while others were determined to keep me out of this, or keep out of that.

The problem with these problems is this: It is sin. It is control. It is manipulation. It is dishonest. It is abusive. It's lies. Listen to Jesus. He said of such people:

You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies. Because I tell the truth, you do not listen to Me.¹³

How do you feel, right now? Probably the same way I do. We as a congregation are standing here before God and we're dragging out these ugly things. We don't like it. We want this to go away. Let's just talk about Jesus our buddy, pal and friend. Let's just talk about streets of gold and mansions in the here-after.

We can't. We can't because we are covered in sin. When people are treated like this in this house of God, we are not "Being" correctly. We are not:

Being with Jesus.
Walking with Him.
Learning from Him.
Sitting at His feet.

We are not allowing Jesus to be there:

Calming the storms of life.
Feeding us in His Holy Supper.
Filling us with the Holy Spirit.
Never leaving us alone.

13 John 8:44-45

We are not:

Being together.
Holding each other up.
Supporting each other.
Standing together against Satan.

He is the one bringing all of this mess in here. He is the source of filth. We need to get washed clean. We have been. That is what that is for. That Baptism Font is the place of washing. We should each and everyday remember our Baptism, and drown that old Adam in us to death. Not resuscitate him and hold him up proudly.

We were Baptized into Jesus death. A death meant to kill 'death' dead. The Bible says:

Do you not know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? When we were baptized into His death, we were placed into the tomb with Him. As Christ was brought back from death to life by the glorious power of the Father, so we, too, should live a new kind of life.

If we have become united with Him in a death like His, certainly we will also be united with Him when we come back to life as He did.

We know that the person we used to be was crucified with Him to put an end to sin in our bodies. Because of this we are no longer slaves to sin. The person who has died has been freed from sin.¹⁴

Through the Sacred Sacrament of Holy Baptism you have been set free, so why do some so eagerly re-enslave themselves to Satan?

To fix the mess in the Christian Church in America, or just here at St. John's, someone has to win. So if someone has to win it should be me. No. It should be you! Wrong again. The only way to heal is for Jesus, and Jesus alone, to win.

This week in Red Letter Challenge you will be reading about "Being." If we are going to learn about being with Jesus this week the first thing we should learn is how to submit to Him. How to sit at His feet. How to learn from Him. Only then

14 Romans 6:3-5

can we walk with Him, and imitate Him. When we do that His kingdom is extended. He wins. In losing to Him our victory is complete.

Holy Sacred Scripture says:

Everyone who has been **born from God** has won the victory over the world. Our faith is what wins the victory over the world. Who wins the victory over the world? Is it not the person who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?¹⁵

Born from God. Listen to Jesus. He said,

I can guarantee this truth: No one can see God's kingdom without being **born from above**.¹⁶

When we are being with Jesus, people are being forgiven and saved. That message is for all people. Forgive and saved. When that happens guess what? There is a time of celebration!

Jesus said:

I tell you, there is rejoicing
in the presence of the angels of God
over one sinner who repents.¹⁷

It's time to repent. Then it is time to celebrate. The date for the party has already been set. It's April 12th. It's coming. It's Easter. It's Victory! Celebration and Hallelujahs!!

Spend this week being with Jesus. Hearing His judgment against sin, but more importantly His comfort in forgiveness for all who repent.

Amen.

15 1 John 5:4-5

16 John 3:3

17 Luke 15:10