

“1st Pres: Our Future”
Revelation 22:12-14, 16-17; John 1:19-34

- 19** Now this was John’s testimony when the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was.
- 20** He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, “I am not the Messiah.”
- 21** They asked him, “Then who are you? Are you Elijah?” He said, “I am not.” “Are you the Prophet?” He answered, “No.”
- 22** Finally they said, “Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?”
- 23** John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, “I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way for the Lord.’ ”
- 24** Now the Pharisees who had been sent questioned him,
- 25** “Why then do you baptize if you are not the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?”
- 26** “I baptize with water,” John replied, “but among you stands one you do not know.
- 27** He is the one who comes after me, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.”
- 28** This all happened at Bethany on the other side of the Jordan, where John was baptizing.
- 29** The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!
- 30** This is the one I meant when I said, ‘A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.’
- 31** I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel.”
- 32** Then John gave this testimony: “I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him.
- 33** And I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, ‘The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.’
- 34** I have seen and I testify that this is God’s Chosen One.”

Introduction

The story is told of a man walking along the beach. Washed up on the sand is an ancient magic lamp. He rubs it and the genie answers. He is told there’s one remaining wish. After thinking for a minute, he asked the genie for next year’s stock market report. In a puff of smoke, the genie was gone and in his place was a page of next year’s financial news.

Imagine how he gleefully sat down to peruse his lucky trophy. Knowing the winners a year in advance, he could invest with certainty. But as the page fell to his lap, it

turned over to the obituary column. At the top of the listing a name caught his attention – it was his!

What will the future bring? We can be fascinated by and somewhat fearful thinking about future; always wondering about it, looking forward to it or just wanting to ignore it. So, what does the future hold for First Presbyterian Church? Over the past few weeks we have looked at our history, our identity and our connections. This morning I want us to think about our future. What's just around the corner? Where will 1st Pres be five years, ten years from now? And if you had that one wish, what would it be?

I. Identifying and Exalting Jesus

“Now this was John the Baptist’s testimony” when priests and Levites from Jerusalem came “to ask him who he was.” These respected religious leaders came to see John the Baptist for several reasons. As guardians of the faith they wanted to investigate any new preaching. They wanted to see if John had the credentials to be a prophet. And they were probably a bit jealous and worried about his popularity.

It says, “He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, ‘I am not the Christ.’” Throughout the late Old Testament period, hope in the coming Messiah was widespread. The Lord’s anointed would be someone filled with God’s power and Spirit who would work some saving miracle on behalf of God’s people. There were many in that day who claimed to be the Christ. John firmly declares he is not the One.

The world needs to know that our hope as Christians is not in ourselves. We are in the same boat with everyone else in the world. Without Christ, we too are lost, sinful, hopeless, fearful, uncertain – especially about the future.

“Then who are you?” they wanted to know. Are you Elijah, returned as Malachi spoke? “I am not.” “Are you the Prophet,” as Moses promised? He answered, “No.” Finally they said, “Who are you? Give us an answer. What do you say about yourself?”

Quoting Isaiah 40, John said, “I am the voice of one calling in the desert, Make straight the way for the Lord.” The leaders kept pressing John to say who he was because people were expecting the Messiah to come. In Luke’s Gospel, it says that “the people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Christ.” But John said “no.” He emphasized only *why* he had come – to prepare the way for Messiah.

The future of 1st Pres cannot be based concerts and community service, pastors, programs and events, as good as they may be. The future of this church is you wanting the people in your life to know who Jesus is. And if that's not happening, this beautiful building could make a great museum piece.

Last Sunday, a Lutheran pastor and his wife visiting from Denmark came to worship. Afterward, he was telling me about the many church buildings in Denmark that are churches no longer. One in particular is now an antique mall. Nothing on the inside distinguishes it from dozens of antique dealers in town. There's a typical musty smell with dusty relics from the past. But if you look closely at the outside, you'd notice it was a church before it became an antique store. History sends us this caution, because it has happened all over Europe and is now happening in the United States.

John the Baptist saw himself as a voice, a tool in God's hands, preparing the way, pointing to Jesus. And so should everyone here at 1st Pres.

II. Persuading and Teaching

“The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, ‘Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. This is the One... I have seen and I testify that this is the chosen One, the Son of God.’

Read through all of chapter one of John's Gospel. A striking feature of this account is that people who become disciples of Jesus know what to call him. In this one chapter there is a litany of titles that could serve as an index to the New Testament list of the names for Jesus: the Word of God, the true light, the One and Only, the Messiah, the Prophet, the Lamb of God, the One who baptizes with the Spirit, chosen of God, rabbi/teacher, the Christ/anointed One, the son of Joseph, a Nazarene, the Son of God, the Son of Man, the King of Israel. All those names for Jesus in the first chapter. In the last chapter of the Bible, we read and heard more: the Alpha and the Omega, the Root and offspring of David, the bright Morning Star in Revelation 22.

If someone asked you who Jesus is, would you be able to come up with a sustained list, a definition, an explanation, a teaching? Do you know what each of these names for Jesus means? The Christological content of discipleship is wanting in our church today. Yet the future of this church depends on it.

I once asked an adult Bible study group, “What does it mean that Jesus is the Lamb of God?” Someone immediately said that Jesus was “gentle and nice.” I had to smile and say, “Okay...” and then go on to teach about Abraham and Isaac, how God provided the ram to be sacrificed in place of Abraham’s son; about the Passover, how God “passed over” the houses of Israelites when judgment came upon Egypt. It was the blood of the lamb on the doorposts that signified their salvation. And the idea of substitutionary atonement: Jesus is the sacrificial Lamb provided by God to take away our sin. Jesus really did die in your place and for all those who would come to trust in him as Savior.

Love for the Lord and love for people are important (the great commandment). But making disciples (the great commission) is the future of the church. John knew exactly what to say when the questions came. And, so should you.

Following Pentecost (the day we celebrate next Sunday), Peter, James, and John, Paul, Barnabas and John Mark began to preach and teach the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. For both Jews and Gentiles, the message of God’s saving grace in Jesus Christ would be shared world-wide. In Acts 2, the crowd on Pentecost said, “We hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own languages!” It says they were amazed and perplexed as they asked, “What does this mean?” Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd.” And so should you.

Conclusion

What does the future hold for 1st Pres? We don’t know; yet we do. The future is in the call to identify and exalt the Lord Jesus Christ; to persuade and teach others so that they too might come into a saving relationship with God in Christ. Discipleship is both: love for the Lord and knowledge of the Lord. John’s message is our message to share as well: “Make the road straight for God. Here he is, God’s Passover Lamb. He forgives the sins of the world. There’s no question about it: This is the Son of God.”

Let us pray together.

Revelation 22:12-14, 16-17

The Risen Lord Jesus said, "Look, I am coming soon!

My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done.

I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.

Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life
and may go through the gates into the city.

I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star."

The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let the one who hears say, "Come!"

Let the one who is thirsty come;

and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life.