



Flag Day

Sunday, June 14, 2020

Clifford Baptist Church, Amherst, Virginia
Rev. Dr. Michael R. Fitzgerald, Senior Pastor

(Transcription from the Morning Service that was Streamed Live)

Sermon Series #6: “The Ministry of Introductions” Scripture: John 1:35-42 (King James Version)

Worshipping today were folks with last names of “N-Z.” Pastor Mike announced that next Sunday, June 21, the “ban” will be lifted, so everyone can come! (Social distancing, etc. will remain in place until the state enters Phase III. The service will continue to be streamed live). In observance of Flag Day, the area behind Pastor Mike had an open Bible and American Flag arranged behind it, next to a lovely flower arrangement. Deacon Ed Sale opened with 2 Peter 3:13 “Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth.” Pastor Tom Doss led us in singing “These are the Day of Elijah” and “Face to Face.” Pastor Jeffrey Campbell blessed the offering. Tommy Thacker sang “What a Day, Glorious Day” and received a standing ovation! The next song was “The Revelation Song.” Pastor Clyde Mawyer delivered the Morning Prayer. Pastor Mike welcomed us in the sanctuary and those listening by media.

The Gospel of John was one of the last books written in your New Testament—around 80-90 AD. All of the books in the New Testament were written in the first century of the history of Jesus Christ’s birth through the birth of the church. Fifty years before John wrote this gospel—fifty years before he put pen to paper he had met Jesus. He had come to Him as Lord and Savior; he had walked with Him in ministry. He had seen His healings, heard His sermons, and seen His miracles. He was even with Him when he raised Jairus’ daughter from the dead. John had so many thoughts and memories “percolating” in his brain after fifty years of walking with Jesus Christ—imagine, a half-century of thinking about ministry with the Savior. John knew Him as Messiah; he stood with Him at the foot of the cross and saw Him die. He was one of the first people to stand at the mouth of an empty tomb and know He was raised from the dead.

So God directs John the Disciple to write down this biography of Jesus the Son of God in the latter part of his life. John was an old man now. In fact, all the other disciples were gone; most had died a martyr’s death. His brother, James, died early on when they were beginning as disciples. John was alone most of his life. He had been able to think about, process, and digest the presence of God on earth for fifty years. John came to the complete assurance that Jesus was not a prophet of God, not a representative of God, not an emissary of God, not a heavenly witness of God. Jesus is God Himself walking the soil of the earth. That’s the Bible’s conclusion about who Jesus the Christ is—the Son of God and God the Son. Fifty years after meeting him as Savior and Lord, John writes in Chapter 20, verses 30-31, that you might believe Him as I believe Him—that you will know Him as your Savior and Lord. John writes this gospel as his witnessing tool to who Jesus is, offering Him as Savior to the world—to anyone who will read it.

As the gospel opens, he introduces us to another John—John the Baptist. This morning, my wife, Gwen, planted a seed for me to define John the Baptist. He was not a member of the Southern Baptist Convention! He was John the Baptizer! He baptized people in recognition of their sorrow for sin. From previous sermons, you’ll recall John the Baptist is the cousin and forerunner of Jesus Christ walking the earth. He’s the trailblazer to open the way for Jesus to come and people would recognize Him as the Lord and Savior as God Himself. Basically, John the Baptist had one sermon. He preached that all of us are sinners; we need to be sorry and repent for our sin before Almighty God. All of us need to be forgiven but John brings us to a point of saying “yes, you are a sinner and you must recognize that.” It’s still true today. No one can be saved in Jesus Christ unless we acknowledge our sin before Him. That’s why He went to the cross, to

forgive us of our own personal life of sin. We need to come before Him and say “Lord, I’m sorry. I repent; I want to turn around and come to You. I want to walk away from sin with repentance and sorrow from that which I’ve done against You.” John the Baptist preached that message of sorrow for sin over and over and baptized people. But his baptism was different than the ones we see here in church. His baptism was simply in water to say “Lord I’m sorry; I acknowledge before You that I’m a sinner and come before You in repentance for what I’ve done against you.” John says now that you’re convicted of your sin I want you to know there’s one coming after me who can forgive you of your sin. I just bring the message that you’re a sinner and I’m a sinner, and we need to be sorry but there’s one coming after me whose shoes I’m not worthy to untie. He has the power to forgive you and me of our sin; I’m blazing the trail for the Savior to come to you. John says I want to convict you and convince you that Jesus is coming to save you.

John the Baptist’s life was lived for one reason—to point to the Savior coming after him. He affirmed over and over that “I am not the Christ; I am not the Messiah; I am not the one who can forgive you. I’m sent simply as a voice in the wilderness calling out the name of Jesus.” You’ll notice John quoting from Isaiah “I am a voice.” It doesn’t matter what my name is; it doesn’t matter that you follow me. I’m just a voice calling you to the Savior who’s coming. I’m not important; let me decrease and let Him increase. He’s the Savior and the one you need to know. As a great preacher of repentance, John the Baptist attracted a number of followers. He had “students” of his own ministry who supported him and heard his sermons. And then one day while surrounded by his followers, we read in John 1:29 that he sees Jesus coming. He points to Him and says “There He is, the Lamb of God who can take away the sin of the world. There’s the one I’ve been preparing hearts to receive as I’ve preached these sermons of repentance. There’s the one who can truly forgive us.” John remembers baptizing Jesus; this passage happens after he baptizes Jesus Christ the Savior. He says this man coming toward us is the Son of God—the one who can forgive sin. I can only imagine as John the Baptist stood on that corner in Jerusalem and sees Jesus coming, his followers are mesmerized because of what they’ve heard about Him. This is one day in the life of John. There’s no record the disciples actually talked to Him that day when he said there’s the Lamb of God, the Savior of the world.

So we go to the next day and read from John 1:35-42. “Again the next day after John stood, and two of his disciples; And looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith Behold the Lamb of God! And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. Then Jesus turned and saw them following and saith unto them, What seek ye? They said unto him, Rabbi (which is to say, being interpreted, Master) where dwellest thou? He saith unto them, Come and see. They came and saw where he dwelt, and abode with him that day: for it was about the tenth hour. One of the two which heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. He first findeth his own brother Simon and saith unto him, We have found the Messiah, which is being interpreted, the Christ. And he brought him to Jesus. And when Jesus beheld him, he said, Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone.” May God add His blessing to the reading of His word as we travel through the Gospel of John.

This passage says John the Baptist was with two of his followers—one is named, the other not named. One is Andrew. Who is the other disciple? It was the writer of this gospel, John himself. Whenever he refers to himself in this gospel, it’s never by name—it’s the disciple whom Jesus loved or the disciple who laid his head on Jesus’ chest. He’s very humble about naming himself in his own gospel. It’s obvious that it’s Andrew and John standing with John the Baptist on this particular day. As Jesus passes by these three men, Andrew and John walk away from John the Baptist and begin tracing Jesus’ steps. He is walking ahead; they’re walking behind Him. All of a sudden, the Lord turns and asks “What are you seeking? Why are you following me?” Andrew and John call him Rabbi, Teacher, Master—it’s a title of honor and recognition that there’s something very special about Him. As I was studying for this sermon, I pondered the question they asked “Where do you live?” Why would they ask Jesus where He lived? After thinking and praying about it, I think I understand they were saying we want to have an extended talk with You and we can’t do it here on the

sidewalk. We want to sit down with You, spend time with You, and allow You to speak to us. Can you take us where you live; can we come and have a long discussion? Jesus said “You come and you come now. It’s time for you to be introduced to Me.” They stayed with Him through the day; even the time is noted “the tenth hour” which is 4 o’clock in the afternoon. They spent quality time with Him. They’re getting introduced to Jesus and getting to know Him in a deeper way. They’re taking in His ministry and probably hanging on every word He spoke. John the Baptist had identified Him as the Lamb of God; Andrew and John were awestruck in His presence. I’m sure every minute that passed was important as they heard the words of the Savior.

John the gospel writer is very humble about his first visit with Jesus. He doesn’t mention himself and what happens to him but gives the account of Andrew, his fellow disciple. We learned in Sunday School the first thing Andrew did when he leaves the presence of Jesus was to find his brother, Simon, to bring him to the Savior and to introduce him. Andrew says you’ve got to meet Him and be introduced. I’ve spent time with Him; we’ve found the Messiah and have talked to him one-on-one. I want you, my brother, to have the same introduction. So Andrew leads Simon that same evening to Jesus. When Jesus sees him, he says “You’re Simon.” He knows us through and through. In Psalm 139 it teaches us that the Lord God knows a word before it gets out of the depths onto our tongue; He certainly knows our name. “Your name is Simon; I know exactly who you are. But your name is going to become (speaking in the future tense) Cephas”—the Aramaic word for a stone or rock. The Greek word for rock is Peter. “That will be your new name.” Notice, Jesus didn’t name him Peter that moment but said in the future your name will be Peter—that’s important.

This is not the moment Jesus calls these men as His disciples. This is their “introduction” to Him; this comes before His call to them as disciples. Their calling to discipleship comes later. The actual moment Jesus calls Andrew and Simon as His “bona fide” disciples is recorded in Matthew 4:18-20. “And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. And they straightway left their nets and followed him.” As I process all that I’ve learned in Scripture over the years, I always thought that was their first meeting but it wasn’t; He called them as disciples after they were introduced to Him earlier. John 1 recounts the introduction; Matthew 4 recounts their calling as disciples. What about the humble John who writes this gospel? Although he’s met Jesus, I believe he did exactly the same thing that Andrew did that evening. Maybe they walked out of the house and Andrew said I’m going to go get my brother. I think John said me too! My brother’s name is James and I’m going to bring him to Jesus just as you’re going to bring yours. In Matthew 4 after Jesus calls Andrew and Simon, Jesus travels on and finds two more brothers—verses 21-22: “And going on from thence, he saw other two brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and he called them. And they immediately left the ship and their father and followed him.” So we have introductions which lead to discipleship. I hope you understand we’re picking this up from the viewpoint of John and Matthew but we see the time frame as two separate events.

This is important—an introduction to Jesus led to four men who became disciples of Jesus. We have to understand that an introduction led to a much deeper relationship to come. That’s a key principle of the Bible. Every person in the world deserves to be introduced to Jesus. That’s why we support missions and missionaries all over the world. No one can become a disciple until they’re first introduced to Jesus and come to know and understand who He is; come to see Him as the Christ and give their life in salvation. Then they can become a disciple. But an introduction has to come first.

I’m saying this to parents and grandparents today—I believe the main goal of the family unit is to introduce our children to Jesus. Yes, you educate them, clothe and feed them, and you house them, but the most important task we have as believers is to introduce our children and grandchildren to Him so they can become closer to Him and get on the track of becoming a disciple for Him. I look at my phase of life now and am so grateful for God’s leading but I believe in the

midst of all the tasks, duties, and responsibilities I have my main goal is to introduce two little boys to Jesus who call me “Papa.” If there’s one thing I want my grandsons to know, I want them to grow up knowing Jesus. I want them to love me, trust me, have fun with me and as they get older they can look back and say my grandfather taught me who Jesus is. That’s one of my main responsibilities and joys in life at this point. I long for the day when these two boys look beyond me and see Jesus—that’s my ministry. I pray daily for God to use my public words and actions to introduce people to Jesus. I’m like John the Baptist—I can’t save anybody but we’re to introduce and lead people to Jesus. I can’t save anyone in my own family; I don’t have that privilege. Only Jesus can save a person. But I am called to be introducing people, like Andrew and John, and bring as many as I can to Jesus. He can save them and call them as a disciple. Believer, that’s not just a preacher’s task—it belongs to every single one of us who claims Jesus as Lord and Savior. That is the outlook of our life for our family, community, church—we are here and God gives us breath and life every single day so we might go into the world and introduce others to Jesus by our speech and actions. He’ll open the door so we can bring someone to Him. By our witness and faithfulness, He uses us to introduce His Son to the world. I truly believe He will use us—if you teach Sunday School, are a mission leader, choir member, etc. you’re introducing people to Jesus. Our purpose in all we do is making Jesus known to the world so He can forgive them and make them disciples.

As we leave this place we have a reason to take the introduction of Jesus to the world. When a lost person comes to Jesus, my prayer is that he or she can say “Lord, I’m at the foot of Your cross because I had a relationship with one of Your children, one of Your believers, one of Your own. When I talked to them, I heard Your words. When I saw how they conducted their life, I saw Your actions. It came a time when they spoke Your name and said you need Him. I’m asking for You to save me because You’re the only one who can do that. I’m so thankful for that believer who got me here.” I pray our name will be in these sentences when they kneel at the foot of the cross asking for forgiveness. What a ministry we have—it’s our purpose for being saved and living every day. Believer, will you rededicate your life to the “Ministry of Introductions?” It’s what Andrew did, what John did, John the Baptist, Paul... we can name names all day from the Word of God. But let’s see about our names in that list, too. Will you rededicate your life so that by your words and actions you and I are introducing the world to Jesus? I don’t want to be a stumbling block from someone getting to Jesus, do you? Let’s rededicate our lives to the “Ministry of Introductions” and Jesus will pick it up and make disciples. That’s our goal, brothers and sisters.

Today if you need Him I pray you’ve had a sufficient introduction to the love of God. The Son of God—God Himself laying down His life to take our sin away. It’s hard to say it—God Himself died that we might be forgiven. It’s so overwhelming and awesome! By John’s Gospel the Son of God, the Lamb of God, the last sacrifice came to give His life for us. Most people know about Jesus—where He was born, why we celebrate Christmas and Easter, know He performed miracles, that He’s in the Bible—but they never had a true introduction to Him. If you need that introduction, He loves you; He wants you; He knows your name, your life, your heart—He knows all about you. He died on the cross for you. He did die for the world but also for a world of individuals, and your name was on His heart when he died on that cross. Mine, too. When He rose from the grave, your life was on His heart. It’s the greatest privilege I have to introduce you to Him. Would you come and say “Lord Jesus, I believe that You did it for me. I come to the foot of Your cross, to the mouth of the empty tomb—I want to be Your child. I want to be saved, forgiven, and belong to You. I give my heart to You.” He’s waiting for you to come. You’ll begin by His grace and blessing, not only in forgiveness but also be a disciple. What a wonderful introduction that is, if you will come and say yes.

Let Us Pray: Our Father, Our God, thank You for these moments of worship. I pray, Father, you will emblazon on our hearts and minds the truth that we are to be introducing the world to You. Bless us in these moments of rededication, and I pray salvation for that one person today who comes to You as Savior. Thank You for meeting us here. Amen.