

Preaching
St. Andrews Presbyterian Church
Luke 1:29-42
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This morning, I'd like to begin my message with a quick question—a very easy question—for you if you don't mind. In the Gospel passage we read today, how many identity markers of Jesus did you find? (How many identity markers of Jesus do you see in the text?) One, two, possibly, three, or four depending on how you see it. What is your answer?

I have an answer for you; let's make it easy. As far as I can see, there are four identity markers of Jesus in the text; they are 1) the Lamb of God, 2) the Son of God (somehow implied), 3) Rabbi, and 4) the Messiah. Do you agree with me?

Now, the follow-up question could be, *What importance do these four identity markers have for the Gospel writer and the disciples, and of course, what relevance do the four identity markers have for us today?* That is the central dual question I'd like to explore this morning with you all. But the four are too many (it will take too long; I know that as Presbyterians we have to end the worship service by 12 o'clock on time), so I will focus only on the two of the four; and they are the Lamb of God and the Messiah.

That said, now I can begin with the first identity marker, which is, the Lamb of God.

- Do you remember what happens in Exodus chapter 12? The night before the grand event, Exodus, Moses and Israelites are told to get a lamb, put some of its blood on doorposts, and consume the Lamb. In doing so, God says, Moses and his people will be spared from the last plague that descended upon Pharaoh and his ruthless comrades of Egypt.
- So, in the historical memory of Israel, the Lamb of God, that specific signifier, symbolizes something great; something really special. What is it? It's clear, isn't it? the Lamb of God saves, the Lamb of God rescues; the Lamb of God liberates! Then, whom does it liberate? It's clear, isn't it? The poor, the oppressed, the orphans, the widows, the despised, the wrongly prisoned, the ignored, and the enslaved like Moses and Israelites back then; the Lamb saves, and the Lamb rescues.
- So, Jesus as the Lamb of God? That's what Jesus does, does it not! Jesus saves, rescues, and liberates—Jesus welcoming and liberating the poor, the oppressed, the orphans, the widows, the despised, the wrongly prisoned, the ignored, and the enslaved! From whom? In Jesus' own time, from the Roman Empire; the ruthless, greedy, colonial Empire Jesus encounters. From them, Jesus saves, rescues; and he gives freedom. So, I say, Hallelujah!

- With that Jesus amongst us, I believe, all the oppressing powers and funky-wonky realities lose their power and grips over the innocent; that's what Jesus did, and I believe, that's what we can do.

And that's why, I believe, Martin Luther King could deliver his triumphant speech on the steps of the State Capitol in Montgomery, Alabama, in 1965, after his Selma-Montgomery march. So, he speaks like this:

Last Sunday, more than eight thousands of us started on a mighty walk from Selma, Alabama . . .

They told us we wouldn't get here. And there were those who said that we would get here only over their dead bodies, but all the world today knows that we are here and we are standing before the forces of power in the state of Alabama, saying, 'We ain't goin' let nobody turn us around'. . .

Today I want to tell the city of Selma, today I want to say to the state of Alabama, today I want to say to the people of America and the nations of the world, that we are not about to turn around. We are on the move now . . .

Yes, we are on the move and no wave of racism can stop us ... The burning of our churches will not deter us. The bombing of our homes will not dissuade us . . . The beating and killing of our clergymen and young people will not divert us . . .

We are on the move now. ... Like an idea whose time has come, not even the marching of mighty armies can halt us. We are moving to the land of freedom. [And we can do this]

. . . because . . .

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord . . .
His truth is marching on.
He has sounded forth the trumpet that shall never call retreat . . .

O, be swift, my soul, to answer [the Lord]! Be jubilant, my feet!
Our God is marching on.
Glory, hallelujah! Glory, hallelujah!
Glory, hallelujah! Glory, hallelujah!

That was the King; that was the King; the bold follower of Jesus, and the humble disciple of Christ! So, the Lamb of God, the liberator, the rescuer, the freedom-giver, the way-maker, the miracle-worker, Jesus—he is with us; he is for us, and he is here for the whole world, like he was with Dr. King. That Jesus, we have. So, I say, hallelujah!

As said, this Jesus is the Messiah too; the second identity maker appearing in the Gospel message today; Jesus the Messiah.

- As you may know, in its broadest and simplest interpretation, Messiah means the beloved savior of the whole world. Again, Messiah means the beloved savior for *the whole world*. Here I want to emphasize the last phrase; namely, “the whole world.” This means that Jesus the Messiah loves and cares for the whole people of God that include even the villains, wrongdoers, gangsters, haters, and all other oppressors, way beyond a small group of Christian believers. Jesus the Messiah loves them all.
- Yes, truly, I believe, as the Jesuit Father Pedro Arrupe once said, Jesus has “the preferential option for the poor.” Jesus truly cares for the poor, the oppressed, the orphans, the discriminated, the disparaged, the belittled, and the enslaved. Surely, Jesus does, I believe.
- But at the same time, again, I believe Jesus loves and cares for all the villains, wrongdoers, gangsters, haters, and oppressors too; because in Jesus’ perspective, I believe, they are also the beloved sons and daughters of God.

That’s why Dr. King was sometimes misunderstood, discarded, and even hated by his fellow Christians. If you’re like me, it is very natural to hate and despise the villains, wrongdoers, gangsters, haters, and all other criminals around us. It’s natural, isn’t it? What’s wrong about that?

Then, King says, no no no, that’s not natural. It is only our weakness as human beings. When we’re strong and kind enough, we can even love and care for the villains, wrongdoers, gangsters, and even our haters. So, he speaks as following:

Now there is a final reason I think that Jesus says, “Love your enemies.” It is this: that love has within it redemptive power. And there is a power that eventually transforms individuals. That’s why Jesus says, “Love your enemies.” Because if you [despise] your enemies, you have no way to redeem and to transform your enemies. But, if you love your enemies, you will discover that at the very root of love there is the power of redemption.

Jesus Christ was an extremist for love, truth and goodness, and thereby rose above his environment. Perhaps the South, the nation and the [whole] world are in dire need of creative extremists [like Jesus].

So, Jesus, *the creative extremist of love*, that’s what King is, because Christ loves everyone, including his own enemies, haters, and God-despisers; and because all those enemies need the ever-abounding love and care of the Lord Jesus as well. They all need their own salvation too.

Friends of St. A’s, do you all recall what happens when Handel’s Messiah is sung either in the concert hall or on the streets?

Hallelujah~~! Hallelujah~~! Hallelujah~~! Hallelujah~~! Hallelujah~~!

What happens? What do people do? They all stand! They all sing together! They're all in good mood. I mean, all believers and non-believers. Everybody, just singing "Hallelujah~~!" Why? The whole world, whether they're believes in God or not—the whole world needs the Messiah in this world, isn't that right? Isn't that right?

That's why the disciples are so excited in the passage today—Peter, John, and Andrew, and all others. They are like "I have seen the Messiah. He is here; he is here. The Lamb of God, the Son of God, the true Rabbi. He is here. Here is here! Hallelujah~~! Hallelujah~~! Hallelujah~~! Because he saves; because he rescues; because he loves so much!

- So, like the disciples, why don't we share the good news about this Jesus out in the world; why don't we proclaim the real Jubilee and Joy of Jesus that this broken and hungry world needs so much?
- Why don't we do that, right now, this coming week, and throughout the whole season?
- Friends, let's do that; let's do that. And when we do so this week, let's not forget to bring some good news to the church next week; right here in this room. Let's bring some good news back to this room; bring the good news back, together singing Hallelujah~~! Hallelujah~~! Hallelujah~~! Amen.