

Rorate Coeli with the Rite of Confirmation for Joshan Savage and Gail Sellers
19 December, Anno Domini 2021
St. John 1:19-28
Pr. Kurt Ulmer

In the Name of the Father, and of the +Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

During this time of year most people gather around meals and spend time with folks that they haven't perhaps seen in quite some time. Conversations tend to revolve around families and jobs, vacations and pets, weather and sports. We want our homes filled with laughter and joy. We want everyone to get along and have a good time because, of course, the holidays are about spending time with the those you love. The universal advice especially during these times, is to stay away from talking about serious things because that can make for uncomfortable situations, possibly arguments, and even fractured relationships. "Stay away from religion and politics" is the refrain.

That is quite a beautifully demonic trick if there ever was one. Don't talk about Jesus. Don't talk about the Son of God whose birth is the whole impetus for the trees, the gifts, and the carols. Don't tell them about the One who died for them. Don't warn them that their unbelief condemns them under God's righteous wrath but that God is eager to forgive all who repent. Don't warn them that the time of repentance is drawing to an end.

Imagine having John the Baptist at your Christmas dinner. Judging by what is recorded for us in Holy Scripture, I'm not sure he was all that interested in not talking about religion. Would he have remained silent? Would he have sat quietly by while your children or grandchildren commit adultery, moving in with their boyfriends and girlfriends, making the excuse that he didn't want to alienate them? Would he have politely nodded his head while your neighbor insisted that the different teachings of the denominations or even religions were just matters of personal preference? Would he have done everything he could to not bring up religion so as not to make your cousin who left the church feel uncomfortable? Would he have failed to call out the utter nonsense of the person who week after week despises the means of salvation but insists that he is a Christian?

We all know the answer to those questions. John understood that everything was nothing unless it was rooted in Christ. We may want to dismiss him as just a religious zealot. We may want to just believe that John was specifically called to be that intensely concerned about religious things but that the rest of us don't have

to take the Word of God THAT seriously. And we have all sought to hide behind the excuse that saying something might drive the person further away from the faith. But those are just excuses for our own silence and lack of zeal for the glory of God's name and the salvation of our neighbor. Like the made-up separation of church and state, the mantra of avoiding discussions of religion and politics is nothing more than a crafty attempt to keep the Word of God from being spoken and thus converting sinners to Christ. And too many of us have bought in. We are more concerned with being seen as polite and non-confrontational than we are with pointing others to the One we confess to be the Savior of all people. Does it really make any sense that during the time of the celebration of our Redeemer's birth, we take extra care to NOT talk about our Redeemer's birth with those who do not yet know the joy, the peace, and the forgiveness that are gifts of our Redeemer?

John's zealousness makes us uncomfortable because it exposes our own unwillingness to center our lives and conversations around the only thing that really matters, the only thing that is eternal and has eternal consequences. Repent. It is not ever loving to withhold the Word of God from people, even if they don't like it. If that were the case, God would never have sent Jonah to call Nineveh to repentance, He wouldn't have had John the Baptist confront Herod for his adultery, and Christ wouldn't have told the Pharisees that they were hypocrites doing the will of their father, the devil. If silence was love, God never would have sent you pastors to call you to repentance and absolve you of your sin. Speaking the truth out of concern for the well-being of your neighbor is the most loving thing you can do.

The highest virtue of the Christian faith isn't to make people comfortable or to be easy for them. Comfortable and easy are what the devil is all about. He is always happy to give you what you like, what makes you comfortable. What you need is irrelevant. In fact, Satan doesn't want you to think about what you need. Satan never wants you to feel uncomfortable. He never wants you to have to consider your life according to the Ten Commandments. He never wants you to feel different than the rest of the world. He wants you to comfortably and happily trot down the road to eternal death. He knows full well that faith comes by hearing the Word of God and therefore he will do everything he can think of to make sure that no one speaks so that no one hears.

But Christ is about saving you. That is why He opens His mouth and speaks. By His Word He topples high mountains of pride and arrogance under the weight of His wrath and judgment and by His Word He raises up consciences crushed under the mountain of their guilt by declaring their sins to be forgiven because of His

atonement death. He is about ripping you out of Satan's death grip and bringing you to life. He makes you uncomfortable by confronting your Old Adam head on, not pacifying him. He does not soften the blow of the Law but tells you in no uncertain terms that your grudges, your adulterous thoughts, your greed, your worry, your withholding of your first fruits, your refusal to confess the truth in order to gain man's favor, your willingness to forsake the gathering of God's children and the means of grace for work or fun - all are the works of the devil and all merit the eternal judgement of Almighty God. Christ is about raising to life a new man with new and different desires, desires born of the Holy Spirit, desires that are completely contrary to the damning desires of your flesh - desires to live completely sacrificially, desires to honor His Name in your whole life and in every conversation, desires to drink deeply of the comfort of your Baptism and the Holy Communion, desires to confess your sins and hear Christ's forgiveness, desires to uphold and defend the name and reputation of your neighbor. He loves you enough to kill you so that He can make you, instead, in His own holy and righteous image. He loves you enough to tell you that you are a sinner but that He has, in love become your sin and suffered its death. He loves you enough to tell you that there is absolutely nothing good you can do on your own but that He has done the whole will of God perfectly and by so doing, made you good.

Gail and Joshan, you stand today as witnesses to this truth. You aren't here because you prefer this so-called style of worship or because the people here are nice (though they certainly are). You aren't here because you weighed the evidence and information placed before you and decided that this doctrine was a good option. You are here because here on Sunday morning, in the conference room, or even online the voice of the Good Shepherd has reached from your ears to your heart and now to your mouth that believing you today joyfully confess before Christ and His Church the one true and saving Christian faith. This, as you know, hasn't been your own doing. Christ in His mercy has done this. Because of His desire for your salvation He has confronted your sins of life and belief and revealed in His Word THE truth to you so that you might not be lost but rather rescued from eternal death and given a place at the heavenly feast of salvation. The Holy Spirit called you by the Gospel. He has enlightened you with His gifts. By those same gifts, - the Holy Scriptures and the Sacraments - and only by those gifts, He Himself will keep you in the true faith unto life everlasting. Today, to His and our joy, you publicly confess this faith and so reject all others as false and contrary to Christ. You aren't here because of you, but because of Christ and the salvation that He offers. You are here because Christ, through His Word, has drawn you. You are here, because Christ, through others, spoke His life-giving and saving Word. Do not despise this Word or Christ's Church because apart from

these, none of us can live, none of us can survive the devil's daily onslaught, and none of us can stand on the Last Day.

Do not trade what Christ gives for what you want. Christ's word and work aren't about what you want. They are about what you need. You don't need to be patted on the head, though you want to. You don't need to be entertained, though your flesh enjoys it. You don't need to be wowed by a good show, though your flesh insists anything less is a waste of time. You don't need to be convinced by impressive or flowery speech, though your itching ears would love to be. What you need is to be put to death and raised to life. And this is exactly what Christ does. You need to be brought to repent of your sin and your desires. You need to be absolved and fed. Christ doesn't need your work. You need His. And He stands here in our midst to do His saving work in us.

And as Christ has done for you, He would do for others. He would have them hear the stern warnings of the prophets, of John, of Himself so that they would be stirred out of their earthly comfort and complacency and unbelief. He would have them hear of His atoning death and flee to His cross where they, like you, can find the endless flood of His mercy and forgiveness. That is why there is a Christmas, an Epiphany, a Good Friday, and an Easter. These are not seasons of good feelings, though understood correctly, they can bring the deepest and truest of good feelings even in the darkest of times. These are seasons of truth, the truth, the only truth - Jesus Christ, the Savior of sinners. Every season is the season to speak, to confess before God and before man that Christ has come to set us free from our bondage to sin and death and to give us everlasting life.

Dear children of God, as the Redeemed, may we all be filled with the zealousness of the Baptizer whose fervent love for the Word of God and the salvation promised and now delivered, never missed an opportunity to point people away from himself and toward the One infinitely greater than him - the Son of God who had become the Son of Man to redeem us all. May our whole joy and focus be on Jesus, not just during Christmas, but always as we wait and prepare for His Second and final coming. And may our hearts and mouths be always filled with the good news and praises of Christ to the glory of our Savior and the salvation of all.

In the Name of +Jesus.

(We stand.) The peace of God which passes all understanding keeps your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus.