

The Beloved Disciple

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning. Our reading today is from John chapter 19 verses 19 to 27. Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read, Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews. Many of the Jews read this sign, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and the sign was written in Aramaic, Latin, and Greek. The chief priests of the Jews protested to Pilate, do not write the King of the Jews, but that this man claimed to be the King of the Jews.

Pilate answered, what I have written, I have written. When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom. Let's not tear it, they said to one another. Let's decide by lot who will get it. This happened that the scripture might be fulfilled that said, they divided my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment.

So this is what the soldiers did. Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother there and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, woman, here is your son, and to the disciple, here is your mother.

From that time on, this disciple took her into his home. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Would you pray with me, please? Loving God, thank you for the gift it is to have this moment, for the ways in which you have already made yourself known among us so powerfully this morning, in our prayers, in our songs, and in your word. And Lord, we come with our hearts open now, praying that you would move in us afresh, that you would plant that seed in us that will grow and bear fruit for the honor and glory of your name. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord, we pray. Amen.

So, we're on the fourth Sunday in Lent, and we've taken this journey called Witness at the Cross, and we have talked about what we can learn from the perspectives of a number of people who were at the cross when Jesus died. And so, we've talked about the crowd that was mocking him. We've talked about the two men who were crucified with him. We've talked about the soldiers who actually crucified him.

[2 : 3 7] And today, we're going to talk about a different perspective. We're going to talk about John, the disciple, and what we can learn from how he interacts with Jesus and who he is.

So, that said, I wonder if anyone in here would appreciate being able to move through the world with a little more sense of what to expect. Probably be nice to have a little better sense of what was happening, what was coming, right? I know some folks would really appreciate not to get so surprised so often in the world. Well, there's a way we do that. It helps us out, and we kind of rely on it.

And the way we do that goes to something you heard me talk about in the greeting time, which is we use labels. And that's why I brought this can with me. When you think about it, it's pretty simple, right?

You read it. It tells you what's inside it. And so, you don't just have this thing that you get at home and you hope it's the right thing. You should expect what it says on the label. Not only does it tell you what's inside, it gives you even more information about what's inside here might do to you, which is why I don't read most of the labels on my food, because I kind of know the answer to that already.

That said, it helps us out. And these tools, labels, are important for how we move through the world. Now, the thing about labels is that they come everywhere. They come on your clothes.

[4 : 17] They come on your cars. They come on all kinds of things. And that is supposed to help you, and it does, in fact, help you. Many of us forget that our brains kind of count on this.

There's this innate thing in how your brain works that looks for shortcuts, because your brain has to make decisions all the time. And so, if there's something that can tell your brain, I can skip a few steps because I know what this is already, it looks for that. And the label helps you do that.

So, if something tells you this is sweet, your brain is like, good, I know what to expect. If something tells you this is going to be tart, or this is red, anything like that helps you out, because your brain would be exhausted if it had to figure it out on its own all the time.

You know you carry labels yourself. You carry one big one in your name. Now, see, what's weird about this is that in our culture, names don't mean what they mean in other cultures.

Most of us have names because our parents liked how they sounded, or they knew somebody who had that name, and hopefully, they wanted us to be like them. But see, that's, again, that labeling thing.

[5 : 25] See, you probably didn't think of it that way, but that's how it works, right? And that's how we roll. But when you think about biblical times, and even some other cultures that are still out here right now, names carry profound meaning, because they tell people who the person is.

They tell people's own story. Real world example from the Bible. Jacob. Most folks know who Jacob is. And Jacob, as a label, means supplanter.

Now, if you take it literally, what it means is one who grabs another's heel or rides on another's heel. For those of you who know your Bible trivia, when Jacob was born, he had a twin brother, and he came out holding on to his, okay?

That's where the name comes from. And so, later on, his name is changed by God. This is a profound thing in the Bible. When God changes your name, God is making a statement.

And he changes his name to, somebody tell me, what did he get his name changed to? Israel. Bonus points if you know what it means. Israel means one who wrestles with God.

[6 : 46] Think about Jacob's story. Because Jacob spent a night before he had to go meet his twin brother, after he had deceived him over some stuff. And he spent the night wrestling with, so his name was changed to Israel.

Okay? Another story of this in the Bible. Many of us know the story of Ruth because we hear that statement from Ruth, read so often at weddings. Really profound statement of love.

But, Naomi, Ruth's mother-in-law. Naomi, as a name, means pleasant. Means pleasant. But, for those of you who know the story, Naomi has experienced profound loss when we meet her.

That her husband has died, and her two sons have died. And in that culture, she has no means of supporting herself. And so, she decides to go back to her homeland.

Ruth decides to go with her. And that's where we get that statement of love, because Ruth says that to her. Right? Now, when Naomi gets back to her homeland, here's what she tells people.

[7 : 59] In Ruth, 1.20, what she says is this. Don't call me Naomi anymore, because Naomi means pleasant. She says, call me Mara, which means bitter. Because God has dealt with me bitterly.

Names have meaning. They are labels. Especially in our Bible text. Let's not forget Jesus himself.

The root name on which Jesus is based means one who saves. Seems pretty appropriate.

So, that said, think about the labels you carry. Think about the labels you carry. Because if we see how that matters, and how our biblical heroes deal with the world, and how we know them, and how we understand them, we also know that we carry our own labels.

So, I want to ask you a question. If you were going to write your own story, what do you think you would label yourself?

[9 : 11] How would you want the world to know you beyond your own name? I know we try to live up to goals. We all have aspirations.

We want to be understood in a particular way. But that bears extreme importance to what we're talking about, because we're talking about John. And for those of you who know your Bible, you also know that John is known by another name, especially in the gospel accredited to him.

That John is called the disciple whom Jesus loved. Or the beloved disciple.

We hear that throughout his gospel. It shows up a few times, but it starts to show up primarily towards the back end. And one of the things we see, when that is discussed, for example, in John 13, we are introduced to the Last Supper setting.

And when John is describing himself, he says that he was reclining on Jesus' breast, showing the nature of that relationship.

[10 : 25] We also know that John is one of Jesus' sort of tight circle, if you want to think of it that way. Of course, he has the entire 12. But remember, when he goes to heal Jairus' daughter, who does he take with him?

He takes Peter, James, and. When he goes up on the Mount of Transfiguration, he takes Peter, James, and. When he's praying in Gethsemane, he asks some people to come with him a little bit further than the others, and it's Peter, James, and.

And see, that's why John goes to this place. He knows he has this connection.

He feels how much he is loved by God. And it's an interesting thing, that when he tells his story, when he wants the world to understand who he is, that's how he chooses to label himself.

Again, how would you want to be known if you were telling your own story? Because that's where we find ourselves.

[11 : 38] Now, it's weird, right? Because we talk about this in John sort of claiming this space. He says, I'm the beloved disciple.

I'm the disciple whom Jesus loved. And it feels a little weird because we know that Jesus loves everybody. Right? But what might be different about your world?

If you actually stepped into and claimed that identity with the same confidence, that I am a beloved disciple.

what might be different about how you moved through the world? How might you see yourself in the mirror each morning?

if that's where you started? I am a beloved disciple of Jesus. You see, it's a pretty profound thing.

[12 : 43] And when we read the story here, this section that we read today, it takes us through some of what we've already talked about, but we get to this piece where Jesus looks down from the cross and he sees his mother.

We know that Jesus had a really special connection with his mother. Most of us who were raised in healthy homes do. And he sees her there.

Now, it's interesting because Mary's in a particular place, similar to what we talked about with Naomi. Now, we don't know this for sure, but it's logical based on what we know about history, culture, and what we can glean from the rest of the text.

Now, Mary, the mother of Jesus, is at the crucifixion. She's one of the ones who is confident enough, brave enough, and unafraid enough of the world to actually follow him and not be ashamed to be seen with him, even in that moment.

And so, there she is, feeling all the things you would expect a mother to feel when her son is being crucified. Right? Now, what's also interesting about this particular moment for Mary is what will a lot of scholars believe now.

[13 : 57] is that because Mary was there, Mary had been following Jesus, that her other children probably were cut off from her, that they probably left them alone.

Now, Jesus was the oldest and was kind of responsible for everything. But that being said, the fact that Mary decided to follow Jesus instead of staying in Nazareth with the family, feels like the rest of the family kind of pulled up.

So, like we said about Naomi, then who's her support? Who's going to take care of her?

Where's she supposed to go now? Hence, the moment we have in Scripture. So, she's there, and Jesus looks up and John is there.

And John, knowing how Jesus operates, John, knowing that he is loved by Christ, and John being there and loving Jesus himself and feeling all the things you would feel if someone you love to that degree was enduring what Jesus was doing.

[15 : 19] Jesus sees them both. And he asks them to claim one another in this way.

To the best of our knowledge, John isn't married. John doesn't have a family of his own. And so, he asks them to connect. to express that love for each other in this particularly unique way.

And notice how he labels them. Woman, here is your son. It's a new name.

It's a new label to carry with him into the world. It's a new way of being understood. That I will love him the way I've loved others. And the same thing, he will love her the way he's supposed to.

It's the power of knowing who you are. The power of how Jesus sees you. And that's where I want us to make sure we stay.

[16 : 39] Because being labeled by Jesus this is a pretty powerful thing. To understand that you are loved like that.

To know that that is who you are in his eyes should impact you profoundly. you see we stand here in this moment.

It's March. It's Women's History Month. And I'm don't think I'm going too far out on a limb here to bet that most of my sisters in this room and those of you who are watching us online that most of you have probably heard yourselves be called some things that were not beloved.

I know that as we have just come out of February which is Black History Month I know that I've been called many things that did not reflect being beloved by Jesus.

How would it change your heart? How might it change your life if you remember that you are not just cancer. You are a beloved disciple.

[17 : 51] that you are not just divorced. You are a beloved disciple. You are not just a failure in school. You are a beloved disciple. You are not just lost.

You are a beloved disciple of Jesus. How different would your life be if that is where you started instead of letting the world's words take over your heart and your mind.

because that is who you are. No matter how you feel.

No matter how the world has taught you to think. No matter what you see on commercials and on social media. No matter what someone whom you may have loved at one time told you and made you think.

you are a beloved disciple of Jesus Christ and if you doubt it look up and what I mean by that is you stand here in this moment and you see that cross.

[19 : 03] You need to know that you are loved that much. that even in your own imperfection that you know even in the sins that you know you've committed and that you carry even in all the ways you may be disappointed in yourself that Jesus looks at you and speaks love.

Jesus looks at you and shows you how much he loves you because his arms are spread this far and his feet are nailed to a pole because he loves you like that.

Carry that with you. Let that be your heart. Let that be your starting place peace because this world will tell you any number of lies about yourself.

This world will tell you any number of things that make you feel small. But Jesus knows who you are.

Jesus knows who you really are. And that is who you need to live into. Go into the world today bearing witness to that love.

[20 : 37] Go into the world today knowing that that is your space. That is your name and that is who you will be. Because we are witnesses to a God who loves us like that.

Amen and amen. loving God we thank you that you do love us like that. That you have shown us by your life by your blood by your words by your triumphant resurrection by your presence with us here and now how much we are loved.

Loving God let us claim what you have already spoken over us that we are beloved disciples that we are loved but loved in a way that goes beyond the way the world tends to use the word that goes beyond the ways in which we even understand it ourselves.

We are beloved. It's not a word we use much but it is a word that represents who we are. let us claim it.

Let us go into the world testifying to it and more importantly let us do it. Let us love our neighbors like we have been loved by you.

[22 : 08] May it be so. Amen. I am who he says I am and knowing that to be true I'm going to ask you to take a seat because we need to do a couple things today.

We are going to do our regular announcements and then we have a special announcement. With all that being said let's talk about fish fries quickly. We had \$5.59 this week. It was a beautiful thing because this is the middle of the season and so they usually dip by now and to be at that number is actually quite a blessing.

That being said as we look to what we need this week two areas need some more folks if you are able to step into it. First would be dining hall servers.

People who help out in the dining hall is filling drinks. setting tables etc. Also folks in the dish room. That would be kind of important. So we need folks if you are able to fulfill either of those roles please step forward.

And of course kind of my favorite thing is we need y'all to keep bringing them desserts in. Because you know as I said we were not done after that one big week. So we still need more folks to step into that.

[23 : 10] We do thank you and I've said it last week and I will keep saying it. I appreciate the way as a church folks have stepped up to the need we sent out. And so we are deeply deeply grateful. So if you are able to make a dessert please bring that in.

Also want to call our attention to the Easter celebration. There are ongoing needs for it. And so those are laid out in your bulletin. I'm not just going to read through them but see what is still needed and if you are able to contribute any of that please do.

Also want to make sure everybody understands that we have a regular Bible study scheduled this week. We're back on for Thursday so if you would like to come out please do. One thing we have not been highlighting during announcements I want to make sure this gets some air time is that DJ has put an announcement for the past few weeks about needing hams for the Niagara Falls Easter dinner and we haven't really stepped into that one that much so please make sure you read that and are able to step into what he needs to do that.

Sandy's also got a piece in there for the next Feeding Hope meal so make sure you pay special attention to those announcements. That said I'm going to ask Bill and Louis to come up here for the announcement we need to share.

Good morning. For those that don't know me my name is Bill Becker I'm co-chair of the Staff Parish Relations Committee or SPRC for short Cindy Neese is the other co-chair she's traveling today.

[24 : 35] So on behalf of the SPRC I'm announcing that Pastor Jennifer has accepted a new pastoral appointment at the Watertown Church.

The SPRC is deeply grateful to Pastor Jennifer for her service here at Pendleton Center. She has made a real difference in this church family and we will miss her. Our team will organize a celebration of her ministry before she leaves.

Those details will be forthcoming. Also know that we are developing a proposal for our district superintendent about our needs and hopes as a congregation to help determine who might serve with us next.

Pastor Jennifer's last Sunday with us will be May 26th. Please join me in congratulating her on her new appointment. Thank you. so with that having been shared I invite you to stand as we receive our benediction.

Remember as you go forward that you are beloved disciples of Jesus Christ. God bless us now as we leave to love and serve God and all God's children and all God's people said Amen.

[26 : 17] family come to baby They're great. Amen. Amen. What – church and unity