

The Rev. Michael J. Bridge
Sermon- John 1:29-41
Sunday, January 15, 2017

Recognizing greatness

1. It seems weird that in football certain positions seem to attract certain personalities. Quarterbacks are usually leader-types who are good generals and good at rallying others. This isn't always true, but it is certainly true of the best ones.
2. Wide receivers often seem to be primadonnas who think they are open on every play and who have an attitude of entitlement. It is kind of crazy because the best teams are generally the ones with the best QB, not the best WR. The QB touches the ball on virtually every offensive play. RBs usually touch the ball and accomplish more than any given WR.
3. In post-game interviews, it isn't uncommon to hear a WR like Terrell Owens (who is thankfully out of the league) talk about how he was open every play and the QB needs to get him the ball more. They easily forget that the WR is secondary to the QB.
4. John the Baptists was the great prophet of his day. He was out baptizing and doing his thing and had a great following. According to him, though, he wasn't the QB. He wasn't the team leader. He was the role player. He came to baptize, as he says, so that the Messiah would be revealed.
5. When Jesus entered the scene, even though some of John's disciples felt like Jesus was stealing John's thunder, John was very upfront that it was Jesus who was the great one, the awaited one. Jesus was the focus of John's ministry, and John was just preparing people for him.

John recognized Jesus as one who ranks before him because he was before him.

1. It was said that there would be a prophet who would come and herald the arrival of the Messiah. John the Baptist was that prophet.
2. John had a ministry of his own, trying to bring Israel to a state of repentance where it would go in a new direction of obedience as a nation.
3. But his primary purpose, as we see in the gospel of John, was to bring attention to the one who ranks before of him because he was before him. His baptism of repentance became the precursor to Christ the Messiah who would take Israel in a new direction.
4. John didn't just point to one who ranked before him. He recognized that Jesus was before him. John was older than Jesus by several months- remember that Elizabeth was pregnant with John when Mary was pregnant with Jesus and she went to visit Elizabeth. So what does it mean that Jesus was before John?
5. Just as when he mentions that Jesus is the Son of God in a few verses, this is a recognition that Jesus, the Messiah, was something more than just a great human being. He existed before John because, in fact, Jesus has always existed. Just as the beginning of this chapter tells us, in the very beginning, Jesus was there.

John recognized Jesus as the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.

1. John baptized with water for repentance. But he recognized that Jesus came to bring about something even bigger.
2. The baptism that John brought was a baptism of commitment on behalf of Israel. In being baptized, the individual was the one responsible for the change. The individual was making a commitment to reform his or her life and go in a new direction of obedience.
3. The baptism that Christ brings is wholly different. His is a baptism of the Holy Spirit. This has two significant differences from John's baptism.
 - a. First, the baptism in the Holy Spirit is about an inward change. It isn't about a change of behavior; it is about a change of spirit.
 - b. Second, the baptism in the Holy Spirit isn't about the work that we do in changing ourselves. It is about inviting the Holy Spirit to come in and change us. So it isn't about our obedience and commitment. It is about the commitment that God makes to us by sending us the Spirit in baptism.

John recognized Jesus as the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world".

1. This is significant because the imagery it brings forth would not be lost on those hearing it. The reference draws on the lamb sacrificed by Jews during the Passover.
2. That makes this reference a foreshadowing of the impending death of Christ roughly three years in the future.
3. It is also significant because it helps to spell out the biggest difference between the baptism John offered and the baptism we have in Christ. John's baptism was primarily about changing future actions. When we are baptized into Christ, we receive the forgiveness of sins. This baptism covers past, present, and future, and brings about the forgiveness needed that simply turning from future sins could never provide.

John recognized Jesus as the son of God.

1. The most significant thing that John recognized about Jesus was that he was the Son of God. He recognized that Jesus was not just another man. He wasn't just another prophet. He wasn't just another teacher. He was and is the Son of God, who existed from the beginning of time.

Do we recognize these things about Jesus?

1. John recognized the significance of who Jesus was. He understood that Jesus offered a superior baptism, that he offered the forgiveness of sins, and that he was the Son of God.
2. Do we recognize those same things about him? Do we view Christianity as just an option on the buffet of religious choices? Do we view Christ as just some great man or teacher? Or do we recognize him for who he really is?
3. He is the Son of God. He is our only hope. He is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.