

"LIVING AS CHILDREN OF GOD"

MARK 1:4-11

FIRST S. A. T. EPIPHANY

MESSIAH, BOERNE

JANUARY 7, 2024

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

TEXT: "AS JESUS WAS COMING UP OUT OF THE WATER, HE SAW HEAVEN BEING TORN OPEN AND THE SPIRIT DESCENDING ON HIM LIKE A DOVE. AND A VOICE CAME FROM HEAVEN, 'YOU ARE MY SON, WHOM I LOVE; WITH YOU I AM WELL PLEASSED' (MK 1:10-11).

DEAR FRIENDS IN CHRIST:

FAMILIES OFTEN SHARE COMMON CHARACTERISTICS. FOR EXAMPLE, CHILDREN MAY HAVE THE SAME OR SIMILAR PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS AS THEIR PARENTS, OR THEY MAY ENTER THE SAME OR SIMILAR OCCUPATIONS AS THEIR PARENTS. THEY MAY ALSO BEHAVE IN THE SAME OR SIMILAR WAY. FOR EXAMPLE, I REMEMBER THE MEN IN ONE FAMILY IN THE CONGREGATION WHERE I GREW UP. WITHOUT EVEN KNOWING THEIR LAST NAME, A PERSON COULD IDENTIFY THEM AS BELONGING TO THE SAME FAMILY BY THE WAY THEY WALKED. THEY ALL KIND OF BOBBLED UP AND DOWN AS THEY WALKED. IT WAS QUITE UNIQUE AND IDENTIFIABLE.

WELL, WITH SIMILAR EASE, PEOPLE SHOULD BE ABLE TO IDENTIFY US AS CHRISTIANS—AS GOD'S SONS AND DAUGHTERS—BY THE WAY WE WALK THROUGH LIFE, THAT IS, BY OUR WAY OF LIFE. ON THE NIGHT OF HIS BETRAYAL, JESUS TOLD HIS DISCIPLES, "BY

THIS ALL MEN WILL KNOW THAT YOU ARE MY DISCIPLES, IF YOU LOVE ONE ANOTHER" (JN 13:35). YOU SEE, THE BASIC CHARACTERISTIC OF THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY IS AGAPE, THAT IS, SACRIFICIAL LOVE. AS CHRISTIANS WE ARE TO LOVE GOD, EACH OTHER, AND PEOPLE OUTSIDE THE CHRISTIAN FAITH IN THE SAME WAY GOD HAS LOVED US—*SACRIFICIALLY*. HE GAVE US HIS BELOVED SON, JESUS, WHO GAVE *HIS* LIFE FOR THE LIFE OF THE WORLD. THAT KIND OF SACRIFICIAL LIVING OUGHT TO MAKE IT POSSIBLE FOR ANYONE TO IDENTIFY US AS MEMBERS OF GOD'S FAMILY, AS HIS BELOVED CHILDREN.

HOW IS IT POSSIBLE FOR US TO BE PEOPLE THAT LOVE *SACRIFICIALLY* GOD AND OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN CHRIST, AS WELL AS THOSE WHO ARE NOT OF GOD'S FAMILY? WELL, WE NEED TO LISTEN TO GOD'S WORD *ATTENTIVELY* WHEN WE HEAR IT READ AND PREACHED AND WHEN WE READ IT BY OURSELVES OR WITH OTHERS, AND THEN *CONSISTENTLY* OBEY IT. FIRST, *LISTEN*. SECOND, *OBEY*. THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT JOHN THE BAPTIZER DID IN OUR GOSPEL LESSON TODAY, AS WELL AS OUR LORD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST. THEY LISTENED CAREFULLY TO THE WORD OF GOD, AND THEN THEY OBEYED IT. THEY LIVED AS GOD'S CHILDREN.

JOHN, FOR EXAMPLE, LISTENED TO THE WORD OF GOD AND BEGAN HIS MINISTRY IN THE DESERT OF JUDEA NEAR THE JORDAN RIVER. HE HAD HEARD THE WORD OF GOD AND MEDITATED UPON THE

PROPHECIES OF ISAIAH AND MALACHI WHEN THEY SPOKE OF THE MESSENGER WHO WOULD GO BEFORE THE LORD TO PREPARE HIS WAY. HE IDENTIFIED HIMSELF WITH THESE WORDS AS "THE VOICE OF ONE CALLING IN THE DESERT, 'MAKE STRAIGHT THE WAY OF THE LORD'" (JN 1:23). HE THEN OBEYED GOD'S WORD CALLING HIM INTO MINISTRY AND BEGAN PREACHING A BAPTISM OF REPENTANCE FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS. AS PEOPLE RESPONDED TO GOD'S WORD IN REPENTANCE AND WITH CONFESSION, HE BAPTIZED THEM IN THE JORDAN RIVER FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS.

JESUS ALSO LISTENED TO THE WORD OF GOD AND OBEYED IT. LIKE JOHN, GOD'S WORD HAD BEEN A SIGNIFICANT PART OF JESUS' LIFE SINCE CHILDHOOD. JOSEPH AND MARY WERE DEVOUT JEWS, AND REGULAR MEMBERS OF THE SYNAGOGUE IN NAZARETH. THEY TAUGHT JESUS THE HOLY SCRIPTURES. BUT THE QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS HE GAVE THE TEACHERS OF GOD'S WORD IN THE TEMPLE IN JERUSALEM SHOWED THAT HE HAD A MUCH GREATER AND MORE PROFOUND UNDERSTANDING OF GOD'S WILL THAN JOSEPH, MARY, OR THE TEACHERS IN THE SYNAGOGUE COULD HAVE EVER PROVIDED HIM. AND JESUS' RESPONSE TO HIS MOTHER—THAT HE HAD TO BE IN HIS FATHER'S HOUSE (LK 2:49), THAT IS, THE TEMPLE OF HIS HEAVENLY FATHER IN JERUSALEM—SHOWED THAT HE ALREADY UNDERSTOOD HIS IDENTITY AS THE VERY SON OF GOD.

THUS, WHEN JESUS WAS THIRTY YEARS OLD, HE BEGAN HIS

PUBLIC MINISTRY BY BEING BAPTIZED BY JOHN IN THE JORDAN RIVER. AND AS OUR TEXT SAYS, "AND WHEN [JESUS] CAME UP OUT OF THE WATER, IMMEDIATELY HE SAW THE HEAVENS BEING TORN OPEN AND THE SPIRIT DESCENDING ON HIM LIKE A DOVE. AND A VOICE CAME FROM HEAVEN, "YOU ARE MY BELOVED SON; WITH YOU I AM WELL PLEASED" (VV 10-11). BY THE WORD OF GOD, JESUS' IDENTITY WAS CONFIRMED AS THE SON OF GOD, THE SECOND PERSON OF THE HOLY TRINITY, AND THE SAVIOR OF THE WORLD.

WE, TOO, AS GOD'S CHILDREN THROUGH HOLY BAPTISM, NEED TO LISTEN TO THE WORD OF GOD. OR DO WE SIMPLY *HEAR* IT BUT *NOT* LISTEN TO IT? PLANTS NEED LIGHT IN ORDER TO LIVE, BUT IF HOUSE PLANTS DON'T RECEIVE LIGHT CORRECTLY, FOR EXAMPLE, DIRECTLY INSTEAD OF INDIRECTLY, THEY MAY BEGIN TO WILT AND EVENTUALLY DIE. IF WE ARE GOING TO LIVE AS CHILDREN OF GOD, WE MUST LISTEN TO GOD'S WORD EVERY DAY, NOT JUST HEAR IT PREACHED OCCASIONALLY IN CHURCH.

WHILE SERVING AS A PASTOR IN HOUSTON, TEXAS, I HEARD THE FORMER FIFTH VICE PRESIDENT OF OUR SYNOD, THE SAINTED PASTOR GUIDO MERKENS OF CONCORDIA, SAN ANTONIO, SPEAK ABOUT HIS VISIT WITH PASTOR PAUL YUNGI CHO IN SEOUL, SOUTH KOREA. AT THE TIME, PASTOR CHO WAS THE PASTOR OF THE LARGEST CHRISTIAN CHURCH IN SOUTH KOREA, WITH NEARLY A BILLION MEMBERS. PASTOR MERKENS DESCRIBED THE WAY PASTOR CHO

LISTENED TO THE WORD OF GOD FOR THREE HOURS A DAY IN THE WAY MARTIN LUTHER DID. FIRST, HE READ THE BIBLE. SECOND, HE SPOKE TO GOD IN PRAYER. AND THIRD, HE WROTE DOWN HIS THOUGHTS ABOUT GOD'S WORD IN A DIARY. HE DID IT THIS WAY EVERY DAY FOR THREE HOURS A DAY, AND HALF OF HIS CHURCH DID THE SAME FOR ONE HOUR A DAY. WE ALSO NEED TO LISTEN TO THE WORD OF GOD, BECAUSE ONLY BY LISTENING TO GOD'S WORD AND RECEIVING THE SACRAMENTS, DOES THE HOLY SPIRIT WORK IN OUR HEARTS SO THAT WE BELIEVE IT AND PRODUCE GOOD WORKS.

AND THIS IS THE SECOND POINT: AFTER *LISTENING* TO THE WORD OF GOD, WE NEED TO "PRODUCE FRUIT," THAT IS, *OBEY* IT. THAT'S WHAT JOHN THE BAPTIZER DID. HE LISTENED TO THE LORD CALLING HIM THROUGH GOD'S WORD INTO THE DESERT REGION OF JUDEA IN ORDER TO PREPARE HIS WAY, AND IN OBEDIENCE HE BEGAN HIS MINISTRY, BAPTIZING MANY IN THE JORDAN RIVER FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS. THAT'S WHAT JESUS DID TOO. HE LISTENED TO HIS FATHER CALLING HIM TO SAVE PEOPLE FROM THEIR SINS BY FULFILLING EVERYTHING GOD'S RIGHTEOUS LAW REQUIRED, AND HE BEGAN HIS MINISTRY BY BEING BAPTIZED IN OBEDIENCE TO GOD'S WILL.

WE, TOO, AS CHILDREN OF GOD, UPON LISTENING TO THE WORD OF GOD, NEED TO OBEY IT. GOD TELLS US THAT IT IS NECESSARY TO BE BAPTIZED, AS JESUS SAYS, "TRULY, TRULY, I

SAY TO YOU, UNLESS ONE IS BORN OF WATER AND THE SPIRIT [THAT IS, UNLESS A PERSON IS BAPTIZED], HE CANNOT ENTER THE KINGDOM OF GOD" (JN 3:5). HAVE WE BEEN BAPTIZED AND HAVE WE BAPTIZED OUR CHILDREN, THOSE WHOM GOD HAS GIVEN TO US TO BRING UP "IN THE DISCIPLINE AND INSTRUCTION OF THE LORD" (EPH 6:4)? GOD WORD ALSO TELLS US THAT WE SHOULDN'T "GIVE UP MEETING TOGETHER, AS SOME ARE IN THE HABIT OF DOING," BUT RATHER "ENCOURAGE ONE ANOTHER" TO ATTEND WORSHIP SERVICES, "AND ALL THE MORE AS WE SEE THE DAY [THAT IS, THE LAST DAY] APPROACHING" (HEB 10:25). DO WE ATTEND WORSHIP SERVICES REGULARLY AS WELL AS AT OTHER TIMES WHEN THEY ARE OFFERED? FURTHERMORE, GOD TELLS US THAT WE SHOULD RECEIVE THE LORD'S SUPPER *OFTEN*. DO WE? IN OTHER WORDS, DO WE LIVE AS CHILDREN OF GOD, LOVING GOD AND ONE ANOTHER IN SUCH A WAY THAT OTHERS SEE US AS MEMBERS OF GOD'S FAMILY, AS TRUE CHRISTIANS?

DUE TO OUR SINFUL NATURE, EACH OF US IS A DISOBEDIENT CHILD OF GOD. WE *ALL* HAVE BROKEN GOD'S COMMANDMENTS BY NOT LISTENING CAREFULLY TO GOD'S WORD AND NOT DOING ALL THAT HE TELLS US TO DO. WE RIGHTFULLY DESERVE HIS JUST PUNISHMENT AND ETERNAL CONDEMNATION BECAUSE OF OUR SINS. BUT GOD'S ONLY BEGOTTEN SON, JESUS CHRIST, CAME INTO THE WORLD TO SAVE DISOBEDIENT CHILDREN JUST LIKE US. JESUS FULFILLED

ALL THAT GOD REQUIRES OF US, INCLUDING BEING BAPTIZED, AND HE PAID FOR ALL OUR SINS ON THE CROSS. HE GAVE HIS PERFECTLY OBEDIENT LIFE FOR US, THE DISOBEDIENT, SO THAT WE MIGHT LISTEN TO THE FATHER TELL US THROUGH HIS WORD: "YOU ARE MY BELOVED SON, MY BELOVED DAUGHTER, WITH WHOM I AM WELL PLEASED," AND HEARING SUCH GOOD NEWS, OBEY GOD WITH OUR WHOLE LIVES.

DEAR FRIENDS IN CHRIST, GOD HAS GIVEN US A GREAT GIFT IN HOLY BAPTISM. THROUGH HOLY BAPTISM WE ENTER THE FAMILY OF GOD; HE ADOPTS US AS HIS VERY OWN CHILDREN. WE RECEIVE THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS, THE HOLY SPIRIT, AND THE PROMISE OF AN ETERNAL INHERITANCE IN HEAVEN. THROUGH BAPTISM WE ARE UNITED TO CHRIST AND CLOTHED WITH HIS ROBE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, SO THAT WHEN GOD LOOKS AT US, HE DOESN'T SEE US AND OUR SINS BUT HIS SINLESS SON, JESUS CHRIST. AND THESE PRECIOUS GIFTS ARE NOT ONLY FOR US, BUT ARE OFFERED TO *EVERYONE* THROUGH THE GOSPEL. THEREFORE, LET US CONFESS WITH CONFIDENCE THAT JESUS CHRIST IS THE SON OF GOD AND THE SAVIOR OF THE WORLD, SO THAT EVERYONE, UPON LISTENING TO GOD'S GRACIOUS PROMISES, MAY BE BAPTIZED, SHARE WITH US THESE FAMILY CHARACTERISTICS, AND LIVE WITH US AS GOD'S BELOVED CHILDREN. AMEN.