

Sunday, April 25, 2021  
Fourth Sunday of Easter

“Ask Not”

I think you would all probably agree with me that our culture has changed. For instance, let me share with you something that was written back when I was one year old on January 20<sup>th</sup>, 1961. Listen carefully; “In the long history of the world, only a few generations have been granted the role of defending freedom in its hour of maximum danger. I do not shrink from this responsibility, I welcome it. And so, my fellow Americans, ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country. My fellow citizens of the world, ask not what America will do for you, but what together we can do for the freedom of man.”

That of course is the well-known inaugural address of John F. Kennedy. He was dealing with a country that was the only country that could stand up to the Soviet Union, which was trying to spread Marxism across the world. I won't dwell on the examples of how our country has retreated from this address, but I will say that our country, from the top down on all levels; I truly believe the majority no longer believes this or even lives by this. Our culture has changed. But if we take Kennedy's address and we substitute just a couple of words; if we substitute the word American with the word Christian; or substitute the word member for the word citizen. Think of how that would read. ‘My fellow members of the Church, ask not what the Church can do for you. And in place of citizens, my fellow Christians, ask not what the Church can do for you, but ask what you can do for the Church and her Savior, Jesus Christ. You see, I believe unfortunately, that the culture of the church has changed too. It is changed as a result of being too consumed with meeting the demands of culture, of the individuals, and of self.

Let me give you an example. Years ago, in the early 1980's, it was considered an honor to be a Master Teacher. Someone who would be asked to have a student teacher under them, to shadow them, to begin to lead and teach in the class with the master teacher present watching, critiquing, encouraging. Letting that student teacher eventually take over the class and operate it without the master teacher even present. I remember my master teacher, when I was finished; one of the things that he said was, ‘It's been some of the

best weeks of my life. I am so proud of you.’ Do you know how that made me feel? And obviously to me, it really hit me of how much I made him feel. Why did he do it? Because that's what ministry called for. It called for good Christian teachers, in good Christian schools. For people to become good Christian teachers they're not going to learn it by reading a bunch of books. They need to see the master at work, a master teacher. And so, we have some master teachers in the world. Master teachers who go above and beyond they maybe arrange and take a trip to Yosemite, or maybe to Washington DC, or to the state Capitol, or to the missions, or you know things like this. They go above and beyond, and they see it as a privilege to be able to do all these things for the children, and by extension their families.

You know I'm afraid that this is primarily gone. I heard numerous things the last two weeks involving that area of ministry that I was once a part of and when the concept of a master teacher comes up or going above and beyond; what I consistently hear is ‘What are you going to pay me for that?’ ‘But they should pay me more for that.’ ‘I'm not doing it unless I get paid.’ And that I'm afraid, is a sign of pride, a sign of envy. This person over here gets paid extra, I better get paid extra. I'm worth more, because I'm doing this. That takes us back to our Lenten series when we dealt with that deadly sin of pride. The rest of the answer to pride is more of Jesus and less of me. And at the same time, as we see culture changing, and we see the church unfortunately bowing to the demands of culture, of individuals, of self, we need to go back to Easter; to the foundation of Easter.

Do you remember how we heard last week how Jesus opened the scriptures to the disciples? We saw last week how Peter especially learned well and he openly made testimony of Jesus. I'd like to share it with you, I think one of the primary passages that greatly affected the disciples. It's our gospel this morning, where Jesus says, “I am the Good Shepherd.” Again, yes, this is one of those seven *I AM* statements where Jesus uses the personal name of God. What's unique is, this is the only one He repeats. He says twice, “I am the Good Shepherd” and notice He throws that word good in. He's not just saying “I'm the shepherd” because a shepherd is a shepherd. It could be a mediocre shepherd, and He also does not say I'm the lousy or the bad shepherd. He's the Good Shepherd and with the first pronouncement of this, He tells us why. “I lay down my life for the sheep.” How does that differ? Well, the person who is not a Good Shepherd is just a shepherd. He's getting paid for it, he is

not going to go above and beyond unless he gets paid more. The shepherd, when the wolf comes, he leaves, and the wolf snatches up the sheep and scatters them. Why? No ownership, he doesn't really love the sheep. Jesus is the Good Shepherd. He loved the sheep, us, and He laid down His life for us on the cross.

His second reason for being the Good Shepherd is "I know my own and my own know Me." How do we know Jesus? We know Him as the Good Shepherd because we see that He did lay down His life for the sheep, for us, on that cross. He paid the penalty of our sin. He took the death for us. How does he know us? Well, you might say He is the omniscient God, He knows everything, but when we look at it, what Jesus is saying; what John records is 'He knows us when we follow in His footsteps and we lay down our lives for each other.'

On that Easter evening, when He breathed on them, gave them the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit who teaches them all things, who would bring to their remembrance all things, who would give them the very words to say. When Jesus opened the Law, the Prophets, the Psalms to those disciples, when all of that happened we saw last week how well Peter learned from it. Today we see how well John learned. He learned well.

Again, let's go to first John chapter 3; the first of what we believe are three sermons of John when he was a pastor, or teaching elder in Ephesus. What does he say? "By this we know love, that He laid down His life for us." That sounds really similar, doesn't it? He, by the power of the Spirit remembered exactly what Jesus said about being the Good Shepherd. But he doesn't stop there, he addresses that second part; 'my own know me, I know them,' and we ought to lay down our lives for our brother. Who is our brother? We are brothers and sisters through Jesus Christ. We are the children of God and therefore we are brothers and sisters. We show this love, when we lay down our life for our brother, when we make our brother number one. Did John just write a good sermon or did he really believe it? Did he live it?

Well, that takes us back to the story we've been following the last couple of weeks in Easter, Acts, chapter 4. After healing the man born lame, preaching a powerful sermon, a sermon that started with Law and convicted the people that were there; and followed it with gospel; opening the door of

salvation to the people that were there; we see there were a number of outcomes. The first was an outcome regarding the religious leaders. They were, and I quote, “greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people.” Greatly annoyed...these fishermen are teaching the people. You know what, they do not have seminary training, they do not a Master of Divinity, they do not have a certificate given by us. How dare they teach without permission!

Yes, it's kind of like some of the rules that we have to deal with in the childcare center. Someone drives through the back fence, so we have a fence company come out and put up a temporary fence of chain link woven into the existing one, tied to the remaining poles, with poles driven into the ground to hold it up so the kids can't get out. The State says, well no we can't let the kids outside because well, the State analyst has to come out and inspect that temporary fence first to make sure it's OK. This is the kind of attitude the religious leaders had. They were greatly annoyed that these fishermen were preaching without a license or certification. What were they preaching? They were proclaiming in Jesus, the resurrection from the dead. That would really rack the Sadducees off.

So, what was the result of this powerful sermon? “And they arrested them-Peter, John, and the man who was born lame and healed. They put them in custody, in jail, because it was already the evening.” What is the message there? This was so important that they weren't willing to stay after hours. Unless we get overtime pay, we are not going to deal with this, but we're going to make him sit in prison and think about this. We will take it up in the morning, have a good day or night, whichever way you want to look at it. There's the first result.

The second result of this powerful sermon, following a miracle, others saw true faith and Luke records and 5000 men believed. This is like the feeding of the 5000, just the men were counted. We are probably talking more along the lines of 15,000 to 20,000 conversions following this sermon. Why? Because they saw true faith. Peter, John, and this healed man were willing to stand up and speak the truth and the truth was refreshing to people.

The next day is where our scripture picks up this morning. The next day we read that Annas, the former high priest, who by the way was the first one they took Jesus to; Caiaphas, the present high priest, the son-in-law of Annas,

the second person they took Jesus to. John, Annas' oldest son, who was the next in line to become high priest and Alexander and all who were of the high priestly family were there. There is a clear message being made here. These are the people who Jesus was taken to, these are the people who had Jesus killed and this is the family that is going to continue in power. We crucified Jesus, and for now, and the foreseeable future, we are going to crucify anyone who dares preach in His name. It was a powerful political movement telling Peter, John and this healed man, you are going to die unless you knock it off.

And what do we read? They give the three followers of Christ that opportunity. "By what power, and by what name did you do this?" They knew full well. We have already seen that. They knew it was by Jesus. They knew that's what they were preaching. But it's now that you see us here the ones that killed your Lord once they're going to kill you going to answer it in front of us. I bet they we're stuck but when Peter spoke because Peter, well I have to be honest, his response is refreshing. It's not a politically measured response like we continually hear nowadays. With Republican, Democrat, Libertarian everything is so measured and rarely is the question actually answered. It is just the bunch of rigamarole.

How does Peter respond? "Let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth..." (notice how specific that is) there were a number of people called Jesus. It was a very popular name. But this is Jesus, who is claiming the title of Christ, the anointed One from the Greek Old Testament scriptures, the one that was born up in Nazareth. "It's by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified." I mean it is a dagger put in the heart of Annas and Caiaphas and the entire Sanhedrin. You did it, whom God raised from the dead, and you know it. "And we know it in the book of Matthew that they paid off the soldiers to cover up the resurrection, so the truth is just coming out. "Whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man is standing before you well."

Peter, John, and the lame man, they had learned well. They were remembering what Jesus said, "I'm the Good Shepherd, I lay down my life for my sheep. And as John had said we also ought to lay down our lives for each other. Peter, John, this healed man, they were putting their lives on the line. They knew the threat and wouldn't retreat; so they laid down their lives for those who heard it.

You see, when they preached, everyone there knew that they really believed that Jesus was the Messiah, that He had died, and rose and was coming back. There was no doubt they really believed it because they put their life on the line. And knowing that they lay down their lives for God's people, those Hebrew religious leaders who had killed Jesus. They're laying down their lives in front of them saying, 'here's the truth, it's Jesus. It's time to turn to Him and turn away from sin. They did it for all the people that were outside and would hear about this; but they would know these three men really believe and they're giving their testimony. They did it for us, knowing that the Spirit would pass the word down generation to generation all the way to 2021. You see, this is truly living 'more Jesus and less me'; by following Him and laying down their lives for others.

The challenge for us today, it takes us back to what we heard from Kennedy but put into a Christian setting, "Ask not what Jesus, His church, your fellow members; let's take it even outside of that as Kennedy said, your country can do for you; instead learn from Jesus and be the shepherd and do for others what has already been done for us; lay down your lives for Him and for them. In our Saviors Name, Amen.