

January 2, 2011 John 1:19-34 The Christmas Story Continues

Story – “Two Clowns in a Pick-up” by Luci Swindoll as retold in *House Blend*

Several years ago I was driving down a rain-swept street in Long Beach, CA on an errand from my office. It was cold, the day was dreary, the sky was overcast, I couldn't find the address I was seeking, and my spirit was out of sorts. I hadn't wanted to leave the comfort of a warm office, but I had no choice. As I was driving along, fretting about a problem that was sapping my emotional energy, I said to God, “Lord, would You please give me a perk? Some little, something to lift my spirit? Doesn't have to be big. Doesn't have to be flashy. Just do something creative to cheer me up and remind me that I'm glad I'm alive. I'd appreciate that very much.”

At that moment I turned the corner, looked to my left, and there in the cab of a pickup truck sat two clowns. They were fully decked out in clown regalia, complete with red woolen yarn hair, big bow ties, painted faced, and each holding a helium-filled balloon. As I looked at them, they simultaneously turned, looked at me, and flashed toothless grins from ear to ear. What a unique answer to prayer. I absolutely loved it, and all alone in my car I yelled, “All right! Great perk, Lord. What an idea. How clever You are. Who would ever have thought of two clowns in a pickup.”

God can do surprising things. The people were waiting for a Messiah – a king. We know from our journey through the O.T. that when it was foretold that this king would come as a baby – it surprised the people. They were looking for a king with kingly power and might – not a baby.

Just celebrated the story of the birth of that baby – Jesus the Christ.

News of John spreading and that he was baptizing. Who could he be? Was he a prophet or claiming to be this Messiah? The Jews (the religious establishment of Jerusalem) sent out priests, Levites and Pharisees to find out who this man was.

They found him and asked him, “Who are you?” Maybe he was Elijah, for there was a belief that he would make a return before the coming of the Messiah. Maybe he was Moses, or a Moses figure that would take them on a new exodus. Or maybe he was the Messiah. “Who are you?” He was in a location that would make sense for either to make an appearance.

Then John answered. He's not the Messiah. He's not Elijah. He's not the prophet. He's the voice crying out in the wilderness to prepare the way for the Messiah.

Well, that clears everything up – or does it? The Pharisees then ask him – “why are you baptizing?” Why is he doing what he's doing? John makes a distinction – he baptizes w/water to cleanse and purify, but the Messiah will baptize with Spirit – the Messiah will have the power of God and will be God's chosen one.

The next day, we are told by the text (after Jesus' baptism took place??) John points Jesus out and proclaims, “the Lamb of God.” Here is the one!

John's main purpose – to bear witness to Jesus, the true Messiah, so that people may believe. Jesus, from birth to the cross (the Lamb of God)

Our purpose as well – to bear witness to Jesus so that others might believe. We know the gift given to us in the form of a baby; a gift given to a broken and imperfect people; the only gift needed.

Story -- “A Sermon About Love” by Peter Briscoe and Patricia Hickman as retold in *House Blend*

A popular monk in the Middle Ages sent an invitation to everyone in his parish, informing them that he would preach a special sermon that Good Friday evening titled “The Love of God.” He asked them to be sure they arrived before the sun set. Complying with their priest's request, everyone in town was dutifully in their seats as the gray hues of dusk turned to the blackness of night. The monk sat still at the altar as darkness crept into the chapel amid impatient murmurings from the anticipating parishioners. Suddenly a single flame pierced the darkness as the monk lit a candle. He walked toward the towering crucifix at the front of the altar and shone the light on the nail-pierced feet of Jesus. He then raised the candle to the hole in the Savior's side, and by each of His punctured palms. Then, while on his tiptoes, he raised the candle to illuminate the thorn-bloodied forehead of the King of kings. Returning to his seat, he sat down, blew out the candle, and left for home.

We continue to point the way to Christ who was given to us out of God's love for a broken people – the Christmas story continues. . .

Other helpful resources:

1. *John the Baptist Living Beyond the Ordinary: Discovering the Keys to an Abundant Life* Jack Hanford, Ex. Editor
2. *John's Gospel and the Renewal of the Church* Wes Howard-Brook
3. *The Anchor Bible The Gospel According to John I – XII* Raymond Brown
4. *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel* Craig Koester