

**Check Out the Stories**

**December 11, 2016**

**Matthew 11:2-11**

Grace and peace to you from God Our Father and from the One who is the authentic Messiah, amen.

There’s an old story about a man who was accosted on the street by an evangelist who asked him if he was a Christian. The man answered back asking why are you asking me that question. He said, “I could tell you anything you want to hear.” He went on to say to the evangelist, “If you want to know whether I’m a Christian or not, talk to my wife and children. Talk to my neighbors and the people I work with. They can tell you if I’m a Christian…”

I have to admit I don’t have a Clergy sticker or anything else for that matter on my truck that might identify me as a Pastor or a Christian. I figure with the way I drive, I don’t want people to see me and wonder how I could be a Pastor and think to themselves I’d never go to his Church…

Both of these stories relate to the Gospel for this morning by way of authenticity. The man who was accosted by the evangelist basically said check out the stories of the people who know me. They can vouch for me and they will verify whether I’m a Christian or not. In my case, I already know I have issues when I get behind the wheel. I drive too fast and I have very little patience with other drivers who insist on driving at or below the posted speed limit. Sometimes my behavior isn’t very Christ-like… I know I don’t always walk the talk of the Christian life. At times I can’t even control my own tongue. As hard as I try to be a good example, I have my moments that I hope none of you ever have to see. If you were to check out the stories of my life they might not always look like the shining examples I would like them to be.

I’m pretty sure I’m not alone in wishing my behavior more closely matched the Christian faith that I profess. We all have our faults. Mine tend to come out when I’m driving. Can you identify your hidden behavior triggers that set you off? Being authentic doesn’t mean being a perfect human being, it means we admit we’re not all perfect. It means owning up to our faults, confessing them, and then trying harder the next time to do a little better.

John the Baptist wanted to know if Jesus was the real deal. John knew he was born for the purpose of preparing the way for the long awaited Messiah. He had been there at the beginning when the Holy Spirit descended and remained on Jesus. He had baptized Jesus in the Jordan River and heard first-hand the voice of God declaring Jesus to be the beloved son whom God loves. Now he sits alone in prison wondering if he got it right. He needs to know if Jesus is the authentic Messiah or if he should continue seeking another.

Scholars believe John spent his life as an Essene Jew. The Essenes were very austere. They lived outside the city at a place called Qumran. That’s the place where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found. Qumran is located in a mountainous area close to the place where John was Baptizing people in the Jordan River. He called people to confess their sins and to repent. John was faithful in his preaching and didn’t change his message, even when he called out the King to repent. King Herod Antipas was the son of Herod the Great who was the King when Jesus was born. Antipas had an affair with his brother’s wife, then had him killed, divorced his own wife, and married Herodias, his sister-in-law. Imagine the scandal, even more in your face than the Bill Clinton-Monica Lewinski scandal. At least President Clinton did confess his sin, eventually… Herod Antipas refused to confess and repent. Instead he had John thrown into prison. While he was sitting in the dungeon, he must have had a lot of time on his hands to ponder all the things he had seen and heard. Trouble was, he was stuck in prison and expected the Messiah to shake things up. Just last week we were treated to images of John that described the Messiah as an ax wielding zealot ready to take out anyone who refused to change their ways. John must have been waiting for vindication and justice, but when it didn’t come as he expected, he began to wonder if he got it right.

When John’s followers caught up with Jesus to relay his question, Jesus tells them to check out the stories of what he’s been doing. He tells them to let John know what you see and hear. Jesus points them to his actions. Was Jesus authentic? Is Jesus still authentic? To see if He’s still authentic today we can follow His instructions. We can check out the stories of those who’ve had encounters with Jesus lately. Ask any of the families that are going to have a nice Christmas because of the money raised by the annual Christmas auction last Sunday. Ask the girls at Wernle who are hugged every night by blankets provided by our Confirmation students. Ask any of the people who have received comfort, peace, and healings from the Prayer Quilts given out of love. Check out the stories to see if the Body of Christ today is still authentic to the mission Jesus began and then turned over to his followers.

If you do check out the stories you’ll find numerous examples of times when the body of Christ in the world today has lived up to its highest calling. Unfortunately, there are some examples when the body of Christ hasn’t acted very Christ-like either. I’m sure we can all site stories of times when the Church acted in self-interest rather than as a blessing to one in need. Far too many have been victim of the Church at its worst. Someone slighted us or said downright hurtful things. When these hurts happen we ask is this the real Church or should we look for another. In today’s post-modern world culture people are just as likely to quit the Church altogether and blame Jesus as to look for another. The Church is made up of forgiven sinners, but sinners all the same. Every last one of us is nothing more than a sinner of the saviors redeeming. While the Church has its moments of genuine authenticity, only the Savior, Jesus Christ is truly authentic and has walked the walk all the way to Calvary and he did it for the likes of me… and you…

May the God who created us lead us down the path of authentic compassion and love. May the God of our redeeming forgive us when we fail to love as we are loved. May the God of our salvation reconcile us and all this hurting world to perfect peace in Christ Jesus. And may the God of all consolation reassure us that our trust in His Son is not in vain, amen.