

Outrageous Things

John 1:19-28

The Fourth Sunday in Advent, December 23, 2018

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

We say outrageous things.

And when I say that we say outrageous things, I am not talking about our sins. I am not talking about our sinful outbursts which pour out of our mouths from time to time and we regret them. I am not talking about the rash promises that we make when we should not make them and then we cannot keep them once we have said them. No.

I am talking about our confession of faith. When it comes to our confession of faith we say outrageous things.

The first outrageous thing that we say is that this guy from Nazareth rose from the dead. We acknowledge His crucifixion just like everyone else does. In fact we treasure His crucifixion above everyone else and that is another outrageous thing, but one thing at a time. We acknowledge that this man was crucified. He died. He was buried and then on the third day after His death we claim that He came to life again. We claim that His neurons started firing again and that His blood reliquified. We say that His blood came back after He had lost all of it during the crucifixion. We say that His lungs began to breathe again and that His digestion resumed again. We say that He regained His muscle tone and left His tomb.

Our outrageous statements continue. Not only do we say that He came to life again, but that He stayed alive after He came to life again. So this was no pretend death. He did not fall asleep and then later revive in the tomb. He did not fall unconscious and then regain consciousness in the tomb. No. That is not what we say. What we say is that He returned to life never to die again.

When pressed as to where He is if He is alive never to die again, we respond with another outrageous claim. We say that He ascended into heaven. We say that He physically came up off of the ground and arose into heaven until a cloud received Him from the sight of the witnesses who were there.

Then we make the outrageous claim that this man is sitting at the right hand of the Father in heaven and that He reigns over all of human history and the events and powers therein.

These are outrageous claims. They are violent to human reason.

Then we say that in light of these events that the claims that this man made regarding Himself should be taken seriously. Once we take His claims seriously we

wind up making even more outrageous claims. The most outrageous one of them all is that this man is God.

We claim that this man although subject to hunger, thirst, and weariness is the almighty God who commands wind and waves. We claim that He was always God even in His infancy. And so we claim that God became an infant. We claim that God was born of a woman. We claim that the woman from whom He was born was a virgin when she gave birth to Him. We claim that He was without sin unlike other human beings. We claim that He was still God when He grew up. We claim that this God who wrote the Law is now subject to the Law. So we claim that this man who is God was subject to His own parents. He who commands the wind and the waves took commands from Joseph and Mary and was obedient to them. We claim that He was still God when He was baptized and began preaching. We claim that He was God when He suffered. We claim that He was God while Satan was tempting Him. We claim that He was God while people slapped Him and spat on Him. We claim that He was God when Pontius Pilate sentenced Him to crucifixion. We claim that He is God even when the soldiers were beating Him, dividing His garments among themselves, and nailing Him to the cross. And we claim that He is God when He died. We claim that our God died.

Does the outrage have no end?

Well, if we are going to go this far with our outrageous claims, then why stop now? If God did indeed die for us, then we stake our salvation upon a crucifixion. We are basing our claim to resurrection of the dead for ourselves and life everlasting for ourselves on the basis that our God was crucified and that this God is Jesus from Nazareth.

We do not claim that God achieved His great victory over human ailments in a flash of glory and in a great defeat of some kind of evil army. We do not claim that God led His troops into battle and came out victorious in the end. We claim that God won this great victory over sin and death when He died. And it is outrageous even to say that He died.

In light of all of the outrageous things that we say, it seems that the unbelievers make mountains out of molehills when they debate with us. They point out little things. They say that it is outrageous that a snake would talk to Eve in a garden. They say it is outrageous to believe that the events of the Exodus are nothing else than a curious string of natural phenomenon. They say that it is outrageous to think that a donkey talked to Balaam. Why they have so much trouble with Balaam and his donkey, I am uncertain. What about the bush that talked to Moses? They think it is outrageous for us to believe that Moses actually led two million people across the wilderness to the Promised Land. They think it is outrageous for us to believe that the prophets and

judges performed the miracles that are recorded in the Bible. They think it outrageous that the Lord stopped the sun and the moon in the sky in the middle of a battle so that Israel could prevail against its foes. They point out the astronomical events that would have to take place in order for the sun and the moon to stop their motions in the sky. Outrageous they say! You people are stupid for believing it! And let us not forget Jonah who survived three days and three nights in the belly of a great fish.

They say that all of the miracles that our Lord performed were psychological phenomena. They say that His healings and the casting out of demons were psychosomatic phenomena because it is outrageous to claim that Jesus from Nazareth made the lame walk and the deaf hear. Then they simply write off when our Lord made water into wine, walked on the water, or commanded the wind and the waves.

And possibly the most controverted outrageous claim that we make: that God made the world in six ordinary days.

And so what gives you the right to say it? What gives you the right to say that Jesus is God and to celebrate His becoming human at Christmas every year? What gives you the right to celebrate His resurrection every year and His crucifixion and to stake your everlasting life on these things? And what gives you the nerve to say that not only Your everlasting salvation depends on this Jesus from Nazareth, but the salvation of everyone in the world does? What gives you the right to say that everyone has to believe in the same Jesus that you believe in or they are going to hell? What gives you the right to insist that your Jesus is the only way to salvation and that there are no other ways? In light of their outrage the unbelievers want to know, "Just who do you think you are?"

Do you realize how outrageous it was to the priests and Levites that John the Baptist was baptizing people? John the Baptist is a priest, you know. He is the son of Zechariah and Elizabeth. As a son of Zechariah John the Baptist inherited his priesthood from his father. John would have known the Levitical laws governing ceremonial washings. He would have known that it was baptisms that welcomed lepers back into the community of Israel. He would have known that it was washings that purified people from their uncleanness and made them fit to stand in the presence of God.

And what does John do with his holy calling to baptize the lepers and to cleanse the unclean so that they may stand in the presence of God? He goes and baptizes everyone. He baptizes everyone! Understand what John is saying when he baptizes everyone. He is saying that all people are lepers and need baptism to enter into the community God. He is saying that all people are unclean and need purification in order to stand in the presence of God and so John takes his calling to be a priest seriously. He

takes it more seriously than any of the other priests and Levites in the temple. Out of love for his neighbor he begins to baptize everyone for the forgiveness of their sins.

To the minds of the Pharisees this is outrageous! How dare he claim that all people are lepers and need purification before returning to the community of God! That would mean that the Pharisees themselves are also lepers in need of purification before continuing in the people of God. How dare John baptize all people thereby claiming that they are all unclean and in need of purification before they enter into the presence of God! That would mean that the Pharisees themselves are unclean and in need of purification if they are going to stand in the presence of God!

Who does John think he is to make such claims? And so they go out and ask him, "Who are you?" John knows what they are really thinking and he knows what they really need to know so that rather than to identify himself, John tells them, "I am not the Christ."

Well, that clears the first scandal, but he still needs to be somebody if he is going to continue to baptize in this way. "Are you Elijah?" "No." "Are you the prophet?" "No." "Well, then why do you baptize if you are not the Christ, or Elijah, or the prophet?" Who do you think you are? What do you say about yourself? And all John will claim is that he is the voice crying in the wilderness, "Prepare the way of the Lord. Make His paths straight."

He doesn't need to be anybody. All he needs is the calling of God. He is not the Christ. He is not even worthy to undo the strap of the sandal of the Christ.

Now if John the Baptist did not have to be anybody in particular to make the claims that he made, then neither do you have to be anybody in particular in order to make the claims that you make.

You do not have to be wise by the standards of the world. You do not need an advanced academic degree. You do not need to be well spoken, an orator of high standards. You do not have to be rich. You do not have to be influential. You do not have to be published. You don't have to be an elected politician. You do not even have to be able to be one to convince the people to whom you are speaking. John did not convince everyone to whom he spoke, why should you think that you would be any different?

Like John the right to claim outrageous things in the name of Jesus comes from Jesus Himself. All you need is a calling from God and God has called you. He has called you by the Gospel. He has enlightened you with His gifts. He has sanctified and kept you in the true faith. He has baptized you and instructed you in everything that He has

commanded for you. He has made you a royal priesthood. He has made you a holy nation. He has made you a people belonging to Himself.

You do not need to be anyone special. Only the Christ is special. Only He is sinless. Only He is right all of the time and only He is crucified and risen again. Let Him be someone special. Let Him be the One to whom people may ask, "Who are you?" in order to justify His outrageous claims. He can take their questions. He is risen from the dead.

You? You are just you. Just as John the Baptist was just John the Baptist. You are not any more worthy to undo the strap of our Lord's sandals than John was. But you do not need to be any more than that to make all of the outrageous claims in the world. After all the world does not need to know about you. The world needs to know about Him.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.