

Let's Start At the Very Beginning

John 1:1-18

I don't blame you if you're a little confused. Why are we back with John the Baptist again? Isn't he an Advent kind of guy? Isn't he the one who tells us to prepare the way, and make the crooked paths straight and the mountains and the valleys level? I remember something about John from Advent.

You're right. John the Baptist is an Advent kind of guy. We almost always preach about him during Advent, and he usually shows up a couple of other times a year. I admit, though, that this may be the first time I have mentioned John the Baptist so soon after Advent and Christmas.

As you probably know, John the Baptist is not the same guy as the one who wrote the Gospel of John. The Gospel of John is attributed to the same guy who was Jesus's disciple, John, additionally, the writing style of the Gospel of John is similar to 1, 2, and 3 John and the Revelation of John. John the Baptist, on the other hand, was killed by King Herod...We'll come back to John the Baptist in a minute or two.

Did any of you watch the "The Sound of Music" that was on TV a week or two before Christmas? I didn't get to watch the movie, but I got to hear a couple of songs that I've known for a long time. The first was "My Favorite Things" and the second was "Do Re Mi."

I remember talking to an acquaintance awhile back who thought that the syllables "do re mi fa so la ti" were written for just that song. He was surprised to learn that those seven syllables had been used to teach the traditional seven tone scale for a long time.

The use of do, re, mi, and the rest to teach the notes of the musical scale goes back to around the eleventh century, the ten-hundreds. Using those sounds to represent music is called solfege, and the sounds themselves come from an 8th century piece called "The Hymn of Saint John." The words of that hymn are, "**Do** let our voices **resonate** most

purely, **miracles** telling, **far** greater than many; **so** let our tongues be **lavish** in your praises, **Saint John**".

So today's sermon is not the first time that Saint John and "do re mi" have been associated. They've been together since the 8th century, 1400 years ago. And the principle behind the use of solfege, do re mi, is similar to the principle (or one of the principles) in our scripture reading from John's gospel. Julie Andrews sang that principle in this song: "Let's start at the very beginning; a very good place to start."

Once you know the notes that go with do, re, mi, fa, so, la, and ti then you can sing most songs. Like Julie Andrews said, "Once you know the notes to sing, you can sing most anything." You don't have to read music – you just have to read those little syllables. If I want you to sing the notes that go with "Doe, a deer, a female deer" I don't have to write out the musical notation – I can just write the syllable "do re mi do mi do mi." Right? When you know the notes to sing, when you start at the very beginning, you can sing most anything.

When you start at the beginning you learn the essentials. And the Gospel of John starts at the beginning. No, I don't mean with Christmas. John doesn't have a Christmas story in it. No manger, no star, no angels appearing to shepherds in the fields, no Mary and Joseph, none of that. After the part of the Gospel of John that we read, it moves straight into John the Baptist. You may have seen the heading in your Bible when we were doing the scripture reading – "John the Baptist denies being the Messiah." John the writer skips ahead about thirty years and picks up Jesus's earthly life about two or three years before it ends.

So what does it mean that the gospel writer starts at the very beginning if there's nothing in there about the birth of Jesus? How can a story start at the beginning when it skips

thirty years? It can't. The mistake we make sometimes is thinking that the birth of baby Jesus is the beginning of Jesus. That isn't so.

In the beginning, the very beginning, was the Word. There's a capital W on that "Word." "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." That's verse 1, and then that word with a capital W doesn't appear again until verse 14: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father full of grace and truth." The Word was in the beginning, with God; in fact the Word was God. The Word became flesh and lived among us. Whose birth have we just finished celebrating who became flesh and lived among us? Jesus. So Jesus is the Word, and the Word was there in the beginning, and the Word was God. In other words, Jesus is God. Jesus is the Creator.

Let's start at the very beginning of Jesus – the very beginning of the world. We don't think of Jesus as being there with Adam and Eve, with Moses, with David, with the prophets and in the exile. We think of Jesus as starting off in a manger...and in terms of the man that we call Jesus, that is correct. But the Word – the capital W Word that came to earth in human form as Jesus - the Word was there at the creation of the world. The Word was there from the very beginning.

Starting at the beginning means that you build a foundation for what is to come. Starting at the beginning means you're taking care of the basics, you're preparing for the future and taking at least some steps to help determine what that future will be. With "do re mi" you're preparing for a future where you can sing and make music and share that music with others without having to teach them how to read music. When we recognize Jesus's presence at the creation, it changes how we read the Bible. It helps us to realize that God was present, Jesus was present, throughout the Old Testament. Jesus was present during the wandering in the wilderness. Jesus was present during the joyful times

of King David. Jesus was present during the exile. Jesus has been present with God's people since the creation...since the very beginning.

When we recognize that, when we know that and live out of that, we can know that Jesus will be present with us in all of our lives, the good times and the hard times, the times of celebration and the times of exile. When we start at the very beginning, it helps us to know a little more about what we can do, where we can go, what we can accomplish and it reminds us that we are not alone.

As individuals of faith we can go back to the very beginning and recognize Jesus with us in our journey. There's a cartoon I saw that's based on the old story about a person seeing two sets of footprints on the beach. The person is dreaming this, and dreaming that she is with Jesus, and she says to Jesus, "What are those two sets of footprints?" And Jesus says, "Those are the times in your life when you and I were walking together." And she says, "But Jesus, there I see only one set of footprints - why did you abandon me?" Jesus says, "My daughter, that one set of footprints is not where I abandoned you. That one set of footprints is where I carried you." And then the cartoon adds one more panel to this old story, where Jesus says, "And that long deep groove over there? That's where I had to drag you kicking and screaming."

Anyway, as individuals of faith we can go back to the very beginning of our lives and recognize where Jesus has been with us on our journey, whether it's walking along with us, carrying us, or dragging us along. Sometimes something comes along that makes us examine our lives...that makes us take a look at what we're doing and why we're doing it. The New Year is kind of a natural time for that; that's why we have New Year's resolutions. We've taken a look at our lives and decided we need to change something or improve something or leave something behind or develop some sort of habit. Sometimes

it takes, sometimes it doesn't, but there is value in taking a look at our lives, seeing where we've been from the very beginning and looking ahead to where we want to go.

If we went back to our congregation's very beginning; not chronologically, not back to 1833 when the church was founded or the 1928 when this older section of the building was built, or even 1953 with the remodel to the current building, but back to the very beginning in terms of our spiritual roots and spiritual foundation - looking at where we've been from the very beginning and then looking ahead to where we want to go, would we develop a new way to describe what we are about. We sort of did this when we designed our sign a few years ago. We wanted to put something on the sign that would define us - a tag line of who we are. Dr Bob Cleveland said, "Why not put 'A Welcoming Church', 'A Servant Church', 'A Peace Church', 'Cause that's who you really are!" Let me add to that tag line, "Seeking justice, wholeness, and community through the gospel of Jesus".

A Welcoming Church, A Servant Church, A Peace Church, Seeking justice, wholeness, and community through the gospel of Jesus.

Now that's a tag line that defines us. It's a nice thing we could put on our letterhead or on the website or in the worship bulletin. But if that's all it is, just a tagline, then it's probably not worth sharing it. It's one way that we as a congregation can go back to the very beginning. It is one way that we as a congregation can know how Jesus has been with us on our journey from the beginning and into the decades to come....A welcoming church, a servant church, a peace church, seeking justice, wholeness, and community through the gospel of Jesus' It's a re-statement of what we're about, what we hope to accomplish, what we believe God is calling us to. While it may be fairly new, it also takes us back to the very beginning.

What does it mean for you to go back to the very beginning? What does it mean for you to go back to the basics of "do re mi?" How do you recognize Jesus's presence with you

throughout your life up to this point? Where do you think Jesus is calling you to go next?
If you were to develop a tagline for your own life, what would it be?

This is the first Sunday of the New Year. A great time to start at the very beginning, a very good place to start. Amen.

Clay Z. Moyer

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