

March 2, 2014 “Reaction: Response” Pt. 5 John 11:45-57

Once again, I want to begin by simply checking the math. John’s Gospel has been divided into 21 chapters. The portion we are looking at this morning is taken from the ending of chapter 11. Hence the conclusion, as we saw Mark and as we saw with Luke, the writers were not writing biographies as we tend to think of them, a life story from the cradle to the grave. They were telling anyone who would read their documents, the story of the crucifixion and the resurrection of Jesus. They included in those accounts a host of material, teaching, episodes from public ministry, stories of friendships forged along the way, material that makes the point over and over again, that Jesus is the Messiah, the son of God, the one and the only Saviour of the world. God’s provision of the perfect sacrificial lamb to cleanse us of our sin.

And on the way by take note of this insight. The unity of the church of Jesus Christ, world wide will never be a matter of organization. People oversee and create organizations. People do so usually with a specific agenda. Dare I say in a quest in one form or another for power. The unity of the church on earth is found in one fundamental, it’s focus or lack thereof, on the fact of faith in Jesus as the King and Head of the Church. In many ways that it is the issue as we come to the communion table. Is Jesus Christ our Lord? Certainly that is the

issue in the portion I read among us moments ago from John chapter 11 beginning at verse 45.

The portion begins by connecting this particular episode to the previous one, the story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. “Many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, put their faith in Him.” During this series “Reaction: Response” I mentioned a number of times that when the Jews are mentioned in these passages, it is not a reference to an ethnic group. All of the characters mentioned are Jews. They live in the Jewish province of the Roman Empire. If they are involved in regular attendance at worship they do so in the local synagogues. They think of the Scriptures as being “the law and the prophets”. They look to that day when God will free them from Roman domination by sending the Messiah to save them and re-establish the Kingdom of God and the Messiah will occupy David’s throne. They are all Jewish. So when the text refers to the Jews it is a specific reference to the clergy, the priests and rabbis.

Numbers of them were present at the house of Mary and Martha. Numbers of them saw what Jesus did: how He ordered the tomb opened, the stone rolled away, how he called Lazarus to come out, the fact that Lazarus did come out, and was restored to his sisters. What Jesus did was he raised the dead! And John is quick to tell us that even some of those

Pharisees, and Scribes, the teachers of the Law, responded. Some of them believed. That is, they recognized Jesus to be in fact the fulfillment of the prophecies: the Messiah. Did they celebrate their faith in Him publicly? No. Why? Because almost instantly it became politically dangerous do so.

Having told us plainly that there was a response to Jesus raising Lazarus, John invests the balance of this episode in telling us about the reaction. Some reported what Jesus had done to the Pharisees in Jerusalem. As a result the executive committee, that's what we would call it, the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin. A council that our Presbytery resembles.

They have had discussions before. They have tried to trap Jesus before. They have tried to debate with Jesus. And it has come to this. They are agreed something has to be done, the problem is what to do and how to do it, safely, so that they do not get burned in the firestorm they create. There is a lot of hand wringing. They are clearly afraid, they are going to lose the measure of power they have and are permitted to exercise under the Romans. They are afraid that the Romans will rescind their special deal that permits the Sanhedrin to exercise some authority, and the people to practice their traditional faith.

Caiaphas, has been elected to serve as High Priest for that one year. He chairs the meetings. He is the “moderator” in our polity, which is based on this Biblical model. Caiaphas is a practical man. He understands the issues. He understands the fears of his fellow clergy. What Caiaphas says is this: “You don’t get it do you! You just don’t get it. What the situation demands is the elimination of Jesus. It would be best that one should die, rather than that the Jewish nation should perish.”

John adds as commentary, “He did not say this on his own....he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation....and for the scattered children of God.” Jews and Gentiles who would be characterized by their recognition of Jesus as Lamb of God sacrificed for the sins of one and all. “So from that day on they plotted to take His life.” The motion was put to the whole of the Sanhedrin. And the motion passed. And if we wonder how these crude fishermen ever got a hold of this information, John has already told us that back in verse 45. “Many of the Jews (read priests and Pharisees) who had seen what Jesus did....put their faith in Him.”

And John’s commentary explains the reality of what is happening, as opposed to what appears to be happening. The details unfold. Meetings are held. Motions are passed. Plotting continues. But it is God’s plan to redeem, to

save, to cleanse, to draw to Himself, His children far and near that actually unfolds.

Today we celebrate the Lord's supper in the time honoured Biblical fashion. I do not mean that we have cornered the market on how this should be done. I do mean this is not our invention. We have received this from Jesus own hand through His disciples. The broken bread represents Jesus broken on the cross. The wine (grape juice) represents His blood spilled for our redemption. That the best explanation of the Lord's supper is that statement of John the Baptist that we focused our attention on a number of weeks ago. "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." Your sin. My sin. We respond by participating. Receiving. Remembering. Putting our faith in Jesus.

Let us pray.....O Lord our God, for grace poured out upon us in Jesus Christ, your Son and our Lord, we give simple thanks. Be with us at the table. Be among us as we receive. Grant us faith that continues to remember Him, and there by remembers You. Amen