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SERMON TITLE: "The Most Positive Final Word"
SCRIPTURE: John 1:10-13
DATE: January 21, 2018
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READ ALSO PSALM 146

How much experience do you have with disreputable or unethical or unscrupulous people? I am going to tell you three stories.

Story one:

A man owns a seven-acre piece of property. It is woodland. Adjacent to it is a lumber company. The man dies and leaves the property to his four children. They all keep the property. But then they all die. Their children and grandchildren now own the property. There are twenty-seven of them. Some want to use the property. Others want to sell and so they go to see the property. But, the land is landlocked and the surrounding landowner will not give access to the property. It would take a court order and in excess of \$2,000 in fees just to go see it once, even though they are the owners. This is a true story.

Story two:

A man owned the family homestead property which had been purchased by his grandfather around the time of the Civil War from an American Indian tribe. The man had the original abstract written on leather verifying he was the second owner of the property, having purchased it from the Indians in the 1860s. A neighboring landowner came to the current owner to inquire of the property records. The owner only had the original abstract to verify his property's boundaries. The neighbor stole the abstract. This is a true story.

Story three:

Dorothy and her dog Toto lived in Kansas with her Auntie Em and Uncle Henry. She and Toto were whisked away by a cyclone one day. They went on an arduous journey to get back to Kansas. She and some newfound friends go to a great deal of trouble to meet the Wizard's command to rid his kingdom of the Wicked Witch of the West. After finally completing the task, she returns to the Wizard who was willing but unable to help her. After many more ordeals, she learns that her shoes will help her. Clicking her heels, she is propelled through the air and rolls across the prairie to her home. Only, then, she learns Auntie Em and Uncle Henry no longer want to take care of her.

They said from inside the locked door, "We don't know you. You are not welcome here."

Do those stories make you mad? Have you experienced such disreputable or unethical or uncaring behavior? Is the world truly a bad place? Today's passage points to just that. Let's hear JOHN 1:10-11.

"[Jesus] was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world knew him not. He came to his own home, and his own people received him not" (Nestle-Aland trans.).

Various translations have just a little different way of expressing it. Here's the NLT: "He came into the very world he created, but the world didn't recognize him. He came to his own people, and even they rejected him."

Here is a third one to help us understand what John is telling us about Jesus' reception. It is the NIV: "He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him."

Do you hear not just the lack of recognition for his position, but the hostility toward Jesus? We might imagine that this is why Isaiah references the Messiah as "a man of sorrows:"

"He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom others hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not" (Is. 53:3).

John wants us to know the state of the world when Jesus came. The world did not receive Jesus. The state of the world was that way not because it was a particularly bad time but because our world is fallen.

In the Presbyterian Church we hold dear confessions, catechisms, and creeds (like the Apostles' Creed). These help to systematically organize what we believe. One of the catechisms describes the problem:

Q. 6. *Did God create man evil and perverse like this?*

A. No. On the contrary, God created man good and in his image, that is in true righteousness and holiness, so that he might rightly know God, his Creator, love him with his whole heart, and live with him in eternal blessedness, praising and glorifying him.

Q. 7. Where, then, does this corruption of human nature come from?

A. From the fall and disobedience of our first parents, Adam and Eve, in the Garden of Eden; whereby our human life is so poisoned that we are all conceived and born in the state of sin.¹

This is the problem. We have to deal with this problem.

God has to deal with this problem. So how did God do it? What is the nature of God? God operates out of God's nature.

- We know that God is light. (see 1-7-18 sermon)
- We know that God brings life, deliverance, justice, and Joy.
- We know that God sent Jesus, full of grace and truth (see sermon from 1-14-18)

What solution do you think God will offer? Considering God's nature, how do you think God will deal with our rejection and unrighteousness? John tells us in Chapter 1, verses 12-13:

"But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave **power** to become children of God; who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God" (Nestle-Aland trans.).

The New Living Translation (NLT):

"But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave **the right** to become children of God. They are reborn—not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God."

The New International translation (NIV):

"Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but **born of God**."

So even though we rejected God and act unrighteously, God decided that our rebellion would not have the final word. There's a big swing word after all that rejection: **BUT** (to all who received him, who believed in his name)

God does not quit or give up or vacate at the moment of or even at the depth of this tremendous problem.

In the pivotal moment of rejection, God would provide a way so that we can belong to him. God changes the rebellious final word to the most positive final word.

That means God has, in grace, overlooked your unrighteousness and your inability to keep from sinning. If you have Jesus, God has disregarded those times when you have willfully turned your back on God. If you disregard others at times and turn your back on them, God has determined to still love you.

- If you are disparaging of others who believe differently than you, God has chosen to overcome your tendency to judge because you are His.
- If you struggle with addiction and you fall again and again, God still holds you close as His child.
- If you lie to others to make them think better of you, God still counts you as belonging to Him.
- If you struggle with doubt as a believer, God is still going to lift you up because you one of His family.
- When you do the same old thing again and again to the point of exasperation, God still loves you.

Paul says it this way: "In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will" Eph 1:5.

Adoption is a very special thing because the one who adopts does so out of their will and their pleasure. When you adopt it means you take on the burden of someone without conditions. You have accepted, approved of, and embraced someone who may have sins; who may fail you; who may not love you in return.

Do you need a place to belong? When God gives you the power to be His child, you are secure and you belong. If you want to belong, believe in Jesus.

Are you going deeper in your faith, or resistant to inviting him in?

John tells us that Jesus is the light shining in the darkness and darkness will not overcome you. Jesus brings life, justice, deliverance, and Joy. Jesus helps you through both grace and truth. Even though you are sinful, if you believe in Him, you have the right to become the children of God. He has opened the door to you. That's a very positive final word indeed.

AMEN

¹ "The Heidelberg Catechism" from *The Book of Confessions: the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA), Part 1*.