



# Pastor Ken's Sermon

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**2ND EPIPHANY JOHN 1:29-42 AND ISAIAH 49:1-7**

**JANUARY 15, 2023**

**"THAT HE WOULD BE REVEALED"**

This sermon is rather different from any I've preached, and likely most that you've heard. But in another sense its aim is the same as all sermons I've attempted to preach. "The reason I came baptizing was that he might be revealed" - so said John the Baptist. I'll say more about that in a bit. I hope I step into the pulpit each week for the very same reason. In my office there is a prayer attributed to Martin Luther I pray before I lead worship - the closing line of which is "use me as your instrument but do not forsake me, for if ever I was on my own I would easily wreck this all."

For those who may be visitors today, I should start by saying I announced this week my decision, effective this June, to retire after 23 years of ordained ministry. I looked in the church records this week, and aside possibly from Pastor Ted Youngquist, who I'm not sure would have ever retired if his cancer would not have prevented him from serving, I can't tell if any pastor has retired from Calvary for a long time. At least in that regard, I might be a bit of a ground breaker around here.

Marcella and I have pondered this for close to a year and a half, ever since I gently sailed past my 62nd birthday and recalled that 'hey... isn't that when people start to retire'? It didn't occur to me in the slightest that it was time then. But it did again this past fall, and over the holidays, and with our kids all supportive, we decided "it was time."

What I'm about to do is quite normal, and yet for me unique. So, while the "back story" to this story is simply "it's time", the rest of the story is unclear but inviting nonetheless. What is clear is that I love the church, as does Marcella, and we'll not tarry long in finding ways under the Lord's direction to serve her in new capacities. It occurred to me that in one sense I haven't been "a church member" for 23 years, but I'm eager to become one, and have learned much from how members of my congregations, including Calvary, have done so.

This congregation's commitment to monthly mission partners has exposed me to many great places and people to whom I might say "can I help in some way". I will probably golf more - even as I harbor no expectation whatsoever that in so doing, I'll get any better at it! What I will not be over the next five months - is slowing down. I'm retiring, but not "into the sunset" as they say. Presidents are sometimes "lame ducks" - I'm not gonna be one though!

I'm a student of history, and if you are up for a recommendation, let me suggest to you History Channel's documentary "The Men Who Built America" about the great industrialists of the 19th century. In one segment, a current business leader said the following, "good leaders see the road ahead...great ones see around the corner." That's a great line and a great analogy. But not for us - we're the church, and we see things differently.

Hebrews 12:2 says, "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith ..." and Psalm 119:15 says, "I will meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways." Looking at things that way, if what we see up ahead is enticing but not profitable we'll steer clear, while if what we see is challenging, even frightening, and we might want to steer clear-we may see it is the very thing Jesus in his good and perfect will is calling us towards.

So, for the next five months, I'll keep doing what I've tried to do as a pastor, and we must do as a congregation - fix our eyes on Jesus. So, thank you for calling me to be your pastor. For being patient with me when I may have got it wrong and forgiving when I got it wrong again! Thank you for receiving my family into yours. We pastors move about the country a fair amount, so our congregations supply to us what our absent families cannot - support, friendship and baked goods!

I'll be 64 this year. I know, I know, I don't look a day over... 62! "Too young to retire" I've been told a time or two this week. To which I say, "you're right ...and in fact God never lets anyone retire - the good Lord just reassigns his workers to new endeavors." That's what I think the Lord has given me leave to do. I've always believed the call to ordained ministry is a special one, even if I believe it reflects nothing particularly special about the one who hears and accepts it. I was called out of Royal Redeemer Lutheran Church in 1988 to serve as a missionary, and out of Holy Triune Lutheran in 2000 to be a pastor.

Soon to the congregation I return. There is no better place to return - warts ... sins that is and all, for where there are sinners, you can bet Jesus is too - for that is why he came. The prophet Isaiah wrote "you are my servant ...in whom I shall be glorified." He had in mind Israel - but eventually the servant King Jesus, and the congregations his gospel forms. The glory of God is in his coming again and again to people who are so contrary.

You've let me remind you of that for the last six years, so expect more of the same over the next five months. That is why I came. This past week, there was certain NFL quarterback who was asked, with his season over, if he planned to retire. Maybe you heard about him. He said, "I need to let the emotion wear off, then I'll decide." I get it. This has been an emotional week for me, and if former accountants like me hate anything it's a show of emotion!

It will wear off before ramping up again in a while. But I don't believe that will have any impact whatsoever on how I feel about taking leave of this congregation. I will miss it, but I will always thank God for you. This past week I heard a sermon given by a pastor of a church near Madison who, at the age of 64 announced to his congregation his decision to retire. Must be something in the air! He had this wonderful thought for his congregation. He said, 'when life brings change, trust the One who doesn't.' The coming months will bring some changes - but you've got a good leadership team, who covet your prayers and participation in discerning and calling our next pastor. They're a "Covid tested" leadership team - and if we navigated that, we'll navigate this!

John the Baptist, who at the time was a pretty hot religious commodity, said of Jesus, "He must increase, and I must decrease." Pretty much every pastor should use that as a guiding principal, and for that matter, every congregation. Always remember you are servants of a Servant King. Much as John the Baptist did - you hear his voice...that's how you know him. You may struggle to understand follow him, but you keep trusting in Him. Why else do you think they call it "faith?" And Jesus is not called the perfecter of faith for nothing you know. And therefore, with you, I know only good to us will come.

AMEN