

John 7:40-44

February 26, 2012 – 1st SUNDAY IN LENT

σχίσμα ☩ χριστός;

Schism of Christ?☩ **Prophet and Christ in One** (vv.40-42)☩ **Bethlehem – David’s Son** (vv.42-44)

In the name of Jesus, our Lord and Savior, dearly redeemed:

May I ask you a personal question? Does it make any difference what color of shirt you wear to Bible Class? Yes! It most certainly does – when you’re in prison. Let me explain.

At our first orientation for Lino Lakes Corrections, Sgt. Stearly looked around the room, then pointed at me. Really he was pointing at my blue shirt which suddenly matched better my red face. He was telling how prison guards react if there’s a disturbance in a room. “When they rush in,” he said, “guards will seize control of the situation. If you’re wearing the same color as the inmates, they won’t know you from them and may just put you on the floor.” On the way out that evening I mentioned to Sgt. Stearly that I rarely wear that shirt. I wear it even less now, especially not Bible Class in prison.

Civil and religious authorities wanted far worse for Jesus than just throwing Him in prison. As far as they were concerned, He was wearing inmate blue on death row. Flesh and blood with no halo on His head or mighty army behind Him was the wrong uniform in their eyes. Division? Yes! *Schism of Christ.*

☩ **Prophet and Christ in One** (vv.40-42)

People were very impressed with Jesus. He was preaching boldly in the temple at a very popular Feast of the Tabernacles. Jesus called in a loud voice: *“If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.”* (John 7:37–38 NIV84) An invitation with a promise like that cannot come from someone wearing prison blue. He must be God. Only God can quench thirsty souls and make *“living water”* flow from inside them like an artesian well. That’s not stagnant water an algae pond or salt water in the Dead Sea. *“Living water”* keeps on flowing in deserts, bringing life to rocks and sands where nothing could grow before. Neither prison guards nor kings and presidents can cap that!

People were wondering who Jesus might be. *On hearing his words, some of the people said, “Surely this man is the Prophet.” Others said, “He is the Christ.”* Every devout Jew knew God promised Moses in the desert 1500 years earlier: *“I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him.”* (Deuteronomy 18:18) Is Jesus *“the Prophet”*? Or is He *“the Christ”*? *Christ* means *Messiah*, the *Anointed One*, whom God promised for centuries would come and save His people from their sins. Which is it – **the Christ** or **the Prophet**? That’s like arguing whether your name is *Mike* or *Officer* or *Honey*. A married police officer could be all three. No need for *Schism*! It’s not either/or, but both/and.

Some of you have heard my Comparative Religion Lecture about the Great Schism of 1054. Basically, it was not about doctrine. The Roman Catholic Pope and the Patriarch of Constantinople said Jesus was both **the Christ** and **the Prophet**, but they failed to apply this to themselves and let Christ be the Head of His Church on earth. The Roman Catholic Pope excommunicated the Patriarch of Constantinople who then excommunicated the Pope. But Christ accepts no substitutes. And churchmen should not argue about who is in charge. The Great Schism of 1054, continues to this day. Neither side recognizes funerals, marriages and baptisms of the other. When the Pope’s western Crusaders marched to reclaim the Holy Land from the Muslims during the Dark Ages, they did as much damage to eastern Christians as to Muslims. Those scars in Christianity remain despite apologies by recent popes for the

conduct of the Crusaders. Failing to recognize Jesus is as the God-ordained **Christ** and **Prophet** has deadly consequences. Personally, it can cost your immortal soul. A house divided cannot stand.

✠ **Bethlehem – David’s Son** (vv.42-44)

Part of the problem for Jesus’ fellow Jews was His place of birth. Here’s what they were asking: **“Does not the Scripture say that the Christ will come from David’s family and from Bethlehem, the town where David lived?”** They knew Jesus was from Nazareth in Galilee. So how does that work?

The Bible says in 1 Samuel 7:12 and Micah 5:2 that the Christ would come from the family line of David whose hometown was Bethlehem in Judea, not Galilee. But other passages like Isaiah 9:1, said the Christ would come from Galilee: **“...In the future he will honor Galilee of the Gentiles, by the way of the sea, along the Jordan – The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.”** (Isaiah 9:1b–2 NIV84)

How do people can get so hung up on such things? If someone asks where I’m from, should I say Colby, Kansas, where I was born? How about Power, Montana, where my sister Ruth was born a year later? Or Murdo, South Dakota, where brother Chris was born? Was it Denver, Colorado, where I turned five? Or the Oregon Coast grades 1-6; Bend, Oregon, grades 7 and 8; South Dakota for high school; or Wisconsin for college and seminary? Where did I grow up? Some might ask, did I ever grow up?

John reports, **“The people were divided because of Jesus.”** They had a *Schism* over *Christ*. And it wasn’t pretty. **“Some wanted to seize him, but no one laid a hand on him”** – not yet, anyway.

See why you need a childlike faith to come to Christ? Only humble people can listen to **the Prophet** who was born as promised in **Bethlehem – David’s Son** from David’s town. Then Jesus grew up in Galilee to bring light to that dark land of doubt and superstition. Kids can explain this; we don’t need a *Schism*. If you get too big for your britches, too tall for your tunic or too hard for your helmet, how can you bend the knee before great David’s greater Son? Jesus says so humbly and sweetly: **“The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”** (Matthew 20:28 NIV84) How hard our hands unless we learn to fold them in prayer!

Kneeling at the cross gives a whole new perspective on Christ and His Holy Scriptures. Jesus was not accommodating Himself to religious errors of His day; He was constantly correcting them. God was not willing to let people stumble in darkness; He sent His own Son to be the Light for us Gentiles along with His dear Jewish people. The Holy Spirit could not stand by while souls died of thirst on the sand dunes of sin or drank poison water in swamps of despair. Watch our New Life Sunday School children as they grow up in the Lord. If they keep drinking the water of life from God’s holy Word, they’ll be singing God’s praises to children and great grandchildren. God’s Word flows in the deserts of your life.

Whenever I think of an artesian well, I remember checking out the well where my adopted Grandma Rose Rabenberg kept drinking all her life on the farm outside Mobridge, South Dakota. Rose Rabenberg was the great grandmother of our member Rebecca Valleau and great great grandmother of her kids. She wondered why no one liked the water on her farm when city water tasted so bad to her. But her well flowed freely into a creek bed which I finally saw was rusted three feet up on both sides. Iron water made her my first “Iron Lady.” She didn’t care if visitors hated the taste. It was her water. And it was living water. God’s grace is still bringing blessings to many blood bought souls through her today.

Our government may be missing its responsibility to protect the innocent unborn. Persecution may try to force us to disobey God against our conscience. Local “Lutherans” of the ELCA can’t even stand up for God’s great blessing of marriage between one man and one woman for life. Many today still won’t drink the water of life for their thirsty souls. But truly there is no *Schism of Christ* when you let God be God. His hands are still nail-pierced for you because He wants you as His own. May His kind and loving hands seize our hearts and minds. Wear His righteousness as your uniform to look different from the inmates in life’s prison. To **the Prophet** and the **Christ** be glory forever and ever! Amen.