

Look at This
[Isaiah 49:1-7, John 1:29-42](#)
Rev. Curtis Bablitz
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This week is the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Every January, Christians from all different denominations and traditions get together and worship together and celebrate the Unity of the Christian Church, and then for the rest of the year we go back to just barely getting along. I know things are a lot better nowadays than they were in the past – days when if you were Presbyterian and told your parents you were dating a Catholic, they might not be all that excited for you – but even though we get along now, we still like to do our own things our own ways – it's still always a little awkward the one time a year when we worship together and we all have to try something new. And honestly, I think that's okay. I think it's good that we have different traditions and different ways of worshipping God; nothing makes me feel more Presbyterian than attending a worship service somewhere else. When I first moved to Richmond, on my first vacation Sunday I went to one of the big churches in town to see what they were doing and what I might learn from them. I tried to blend in – I took a seat in one of the back rows that was mostly empty, with just one other guy sitting a few seats down. This church had a big band with fancy multicolour spotlights and a smoke machine, and the worship leader was jumping around on stage, waving his hands in the air, trying to get everyone to jump

around with him. And I don't really jump – I will clap along if I have to. And then at one point the music just stopped, and Mr Jumpy said "Alright everyone, it's sharing time! Turn to the person next to you, and tell them your biggest childhood fear." And this is not something Presbyterians do. The only time Presbyterians interact with other Presbyterians in worship, we turn to the person next to us, and we say, The Peace of Christ be With You, And also with you, and that's it. We do not share emotions. We prefer not to have them. But all around me, all the people in this church started enthusiastically disclosing the intimate details of their lives to the total strangers standing next to them, and I knew that the only other man in the row with me had nowhere else to turn, and in that moment, I prayed, maybe harder than I have ever prayed before, Dear God, please, I am begging you, please, make the man next to me a Presbyterian. Friends, don't let anyone tell you that God doesn't answer prayer. I stared down at my shoes, and tried to seem asleep and/or dead, and after a minute or two of silence, I chanced a glance down the row, and the guy there was staring at his shoes, pretending to be asleep and/or dead, and let me tell you, that was true Christian Unity. I've never felt more united with another Christian in my life. And then Sharing Time ended, and the music started up again, and I sang along with a whole new reason to give praise and thanks to God, and I didn't jump, exactly, but I might have swayed a little, because the Spirit was on the move.

I am glad that that church exists. I am glad there is a place for people who worship by jumping and publicly discussing their childhood. And I am glad that this church exists, where jumping is rare. Because Christian Unity doesn't mean Christian Uniformity. It doesn't mean we all become exactly the same, we all worship exactly the same, we all abandon all the distinctive things that make us who we are. I will never be entirely comfortable in a church that has Sharing Time, and I'm sure that Mr. Jumpy Sharing Worship Leader would find our services dull, with not nearly enough trampolines, and that's okay. We need lots of different kinds of churches with lots of different kinds of people in those churches, and we need to be willing to learn from our friends who worship God differently, not so that we become exactly like them, but so that we can understand God a little more deeply by seeing God through their eyes. We start every worship service with a land acknowledgment, and we say that here at RPC we seek to learn from Indigenous wisdom as to how we can live in right-relatedness with Creator, creation and all peoples. And when we say that, we're recognizing that the cultures that we come from shape the ways we see God, and if we only ever consider who God is from the one perspective we grew up in, we will miss out on a fuller picture of who God is. Listening to and Learning from the wisdom of our First Nations brothers and sisters and from Christians in other cultures, this helps us to see God more clearly and helps us see our own culture and its biases and distortions more clearly as well. The church needs different kinds of people from different backgrounds, different nations,

different cultures, different personalities, so that we can all share with each other what we know about who God is. None of us will have a perfect picture of Christ, but working together in humility, we can help to point towards Christ and see him more clearly, see him for who he truly is.

And I think we can see this happening in our gospel reading this morning. Last week we heard the story of Jesus' baptism from the Gospel of Matthew, and this week we heard the same story from the Gospel of John, and here, instead of seeing the baptism, we hear John telling others about it. The baptism itself isn't the focus here, the focus is on John's story about it, John telling others about what he saw when he baptized Jesus. And every time John sees Jesus in this story, he makes sure everyone else around him sees Jesus too. He jumps up and down and waves his arm and shouts – HEY EVERYBODY LOOK OVER HERE! IT'S THE LAMB OF GOD! RIGHT HERE! John is so excited every time he sees Jesus, he just can't contain it, he has to shout and call attention and make a fuss, because this is THE LAMB OF GOD. And John makes a point of telling his own followers about who Jesus is, and he is so persuasive that they stop following John and start following Jesus. John doesn't care that his enthusiasm is actually costing him followers – he just wants more people to see Jesus, notice Jesus, follow Jesus. John wants everyone to understand that Jesus is the LAMB OF GOD.

Because that's who John is – he's Mr. Jumpy Sharing Worship Leader, running around wearing goatskins, eating locusts and wild honey, splashing water around, calling out King Herod. John is amazing, he's big and wild and loud and wonderful. But then at the end of this story, we meet someone very, very different. One of those two followers who left John and followed Jesus is a man named Andrew. And Andrew isn't like John. He isn't flashy. He isn't loud. He doesn't jump. When he meets Jesus, he doesn't shout at the top of his lungs LAMB OF GOD EVERYBODY WOW LOOK AT THIS. No. Andrew goes home, and finds his brother Peter, and tells him, We have found the Messiah. Andrew does the same thing that John does – he points to Jesus Christ, but he does it in a completely different way – he does it quietly, calmly, decently and in good order. Is it any wonder that so many Presbyterian churches are called St. Andrews? We LOVE this guy. This is our kind of evangelism – not showy, flashy, jumpy, it's just finding one person you know who needs to hear about Jesus, and letting that person know that you've found what they need, and you want to share it with them.

John and Andrew are both evangelists here – they both point to Jesus Christ, they both see who Jesus is and then tell others what they've seen, but they are two very different people, and they point to Jesus in very different ways, and that is good. That's wonderful. The church needs people like John, people not afraid to make some noise, to cause a scene, to use flash and flair and razzledazzle to get people's attention so they can meet Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God. And the church needs people like Andrew, people who sit

in the back row and would rather skip sharing time, thanks, but who will take the news they've heard to one person whose life will change forever when they find the Messiah, Jesus Christ. And I'm guessing that most of you know already if you're more like John, or more like Andrew. And when we gather with our fellow Christians, we tend to gather with ones who are more like us – all the Andrews get together and immediately appoint somebody recording secretary, while across town all the John the Baptists are setting up the smoke machines and multicolour spotlights. All the different denominations in the church are different expressions of our cultures and personalities and traditions all melding and blending and clashing together, and they only start causing trouble when we start thinking that our way of worshipping is the only way, when we start worshipping our traditions and culture instead of Jesus Christ. Because in the end, it doesn't make a difference where we stand, what matters is who we are pointing towards, where we are directing our attention, our energy, our worship, our love. Both John and Andrew point towards Jesus Christ, and that's what makes those two very different men part of the same church, the same family. All their energies are devoted towards bringing others to know who Jesus is, to come and meet him as the Messiah, the Lamb of God. And as members of that same family alongside Andrew and John, we are called to do the same thing. We are called to point towards Jesus Christ – in how we live, in our words and actions, in humility and love, we are called to be who we are and accept others as they are, and then work together to point towards Jesus, so

no matter who we meet, the people around us will come to know Christ by coming to know us. The church finds unity in the midst of our diversity by pointing towards Jesus in whatever way we can, from whatever place God has called us to stand, we can help the world meet Jesus, and learn to love the world the way Jesus Christ loves us. Today may we find unity in our differences, and bring the world to know the Messiah, the Lamb of God. In the name of Jesus Christ – Amen!