

January 15, 2017
Come and See
Isaiah 49:1-7; Psalm 40:1-11; 1 Corinthians 1:1-9; John 1:29-42
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Fellow Ministers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ,
Gracia y paz de dios del Padre, Hijo, y Espíritu Santo
Grace to you and peace from God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Oh, look, it's my friend the retired school teacher! Let me introduce you to her.
How would your friends or neighbors introduce you?

Today we hear how John the Baptizer introduces Jesus to the crowds who have been following John. "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" That is a bold claim to make about your cousin, the boy from Nazareth. Because we missed last week's remembering of Jesus' baptism, perhaps a bit more explanation will help us understand this bold, bizarre claim by the Baptizer.

The Synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke tell the story of Jesus being baptized by John in the River Jordan. Matthew and Luke tell of the heavens opening, the appearance of the Holy Spirit – as a dove, and the voice from heaven announcing "This is my Son, the beloved, in whom I am well-pleased".

The fourth evangelist tells no birth narrative of Jesus, there are no shepherds, no angels, no manger, no wise men, no baptism. This gospel writer presumes the hearers know the story and jumps right in with the testimony of John the Baptizer to the crowds. This gospel writer immediately reveals the identity of Jesus as the Messiah.

The day before this scene, some Pharisees had come to the Jordan River to ask John what was going on. Who are you? they asked him.

John assures them he is NOT the Messiah, NOT Elijah returned and not a prophet. He tells them he is, as Isaiah prophesied, "the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord". In other words, John says, I'm the one who will introduce you to the REAL one. The one who comes AFTER me ranks AHEAD of me because he was BEFORE me.

He tells them that there is someone standing among them who they do not know, they do not REALLY know this man who is among them. The next day, John sees Jesus coming and declares "Here is the Lamb of God!"

Oddly, John claims HE doesn't even know this man, yet he knows this is the Lamb of God!? How can that be? Luke, the writer of the third gospel tells us that John and Jesus were cousins. Surely they had met as children? How would John not KNOW Jesus?

We have testimony in the other gospel accounts of Jesus being in the Temple and the synagogues even at a very young age. Surely someone recognized the boy from Nazareth? Is it possible that John and the crowds knew Jesus only as the Carpenter's son, Joseph's kid from Nazareth? The next day John sees Jesus again and exclaims to his disciples "Look, here is the Lamb of God". As if to say "I'm not kidding! This is the promised one. Let me introduce you to him".

And...John's disciples leave John and follow Jesus. John, called by God to be the one who reveals Jesus. Called by God to be the one to introduce Jesus. John, who knew Jesus as a man, as his cousin, now knows Jesus to be the Lamb of God. John, who witnessed the dove descending and the heavens opening and the voice announcing "this is my beloved Son".

John can now testify to his disciples that Jesus is the real deal, the one the world has been waiting for.

The scene that follows is so simple, yet so profound. A couple of John's disciples decide to check out this Rabbi that John speaks so highly of. They ask Jesus "where are you staying"?

Rather than give them an address, Jesus offers a simple invitation: Come and see!

Today we begin the season of Epiphany. The season of light and revelation. In spite of this intense weather we are experiencing, you may have noticed there is a little more daylight each day. Little by little we are moving toward light and warmth.

An appropriate image for our walk of faith. Little by little we walk toward the light and warmth of Jesus and his promises. In baptism we are inseparably tied to Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

In the same way that John the Baptizer was called to give testimony to Jesus, just as Isaiah was called to be a light to all nations, even as Paul was called to be an apostle, we, too are called to reveal Jesus to the nations, to our neighbors, to our friends. We may think our proclamations are not as eloquent as Paul's. We have not seen Jesus with our own eyes as the Baptizer did. We did not hear the voice from heaven personally.

Nonetheless, Jesus invites US to come and see where he is staying. The invitation is real! It is for today! It is for everyone! The invitation is for us to introduce Jesus to our friends, our family, our neighbors, the world, come and see where Jesus is staying.

So, how do we do that? In words adapted from a poem by Howard Thurman we get on with "The Work of Christmas"

When the song of the angels is stilled,
When the star in the sky is gone,
When the kings and princes are home,
When the shepherds are back with their flock,
The work of Christmas begins:
To find the lost,
To heal the broken,
To feed the hungry,
To release the prisoner,
To rebuild the nations,
To bring peace among people,
To make music in the heart.

And to give thanks to God!