

Sermon for the Second Sunday after the Epiphany

January 19, 2020

You just gotta' see this!

Isaiah 49:1-7

Psalm 40:1-12

1 Corinthians 1:1-9

John 1:29-42

We're still in the season of revelation...the season that gives us a chance to listen and learn about all the ways that Jesus was identified as God's Son...as the Messiah. Last Sunday, we heard the scripture passage about Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist. And we heard about the thundering pronouncement from a voice from heaven declaring Jesus was God's son. That's pretty dramatic. And if you were standing on the banks of the Jordan River and heard that voice from heaven and saw that dove, I'm not sure how you could contain yourself. Nobody had ever seen or heard anything like what had just happened. People were stunned. They were mystified. What just happened? Did you hear what I just heard? You could probably hear the murmuring for miles.

Last Sunday we heard this story from the gospel according to Matthew. The story continues this morning with a gospel reading from John about the same event. Now John has a slightly different slant on Jesus' story than the other three gospels, although each of the four gospels is unique. The gospel of John emphasizes from beginning to end the identity of Jesus as God's son and emphasizes his divine nature in a way that the other three gospels do not. The author of John assumes that his audience already knows the basic story about Jesus...just as we modern day Christians do, so his gospel is valuable to us in that it sheds some light on the true nature of Jesus...the divine nature.

In this gospel reading, John the Baptist has completed his mission to baptize Jesus, but there's a part two to his mission. Now his job is to testify about Jesus. He wants everyone to know who Jesus *really* is. He gives his eye-witness account of the whole experience. And certainly John the Baptist was standing closer to Jesus than anyone else and had a ringside seat to the descent of the dove and the voice from heaven. John says he saw it all and he heard it all and he's here to tell us that this man...this Jesus...is, in fact, the Son of God. There's no question in his mind. He gives his testimony the day after the baptism when he sees Jesus coming toward him. He's had all night to think about it. So we know Jesus didn't leave the area immediately. He's still hanging out with John the Baptist and John the Baptist's followers. John hollers out: "Here come the Lamb of God". And he's telling all those standing around him that this Jesus is the one he's been telling them about...the one who takes away the sin of the world! That's an astonishing claim

and not the sort of thing you hear every day. It makes an impression on everyone listening to John.

The next day, John the Baptist does the same thing. This time he testifies to two of his disciples who then follow Jesus. They run after him. "What do you want?" Jesus asks. "What are you looking for?" It's a great question and one that we should be asking ourselves. What *do* we want? What *do* we need? What is it that we are hungry or thirsty for? What are we looking for? Jesus can supply all those needs, but first we need to be able to identify them. Do you know what your needs are? Do you know what you're looking for? This is a question worth wrestling with...not just as individuals, but as a community...as a congregation...as the body of Christ in the world. The answer to these questions will guide our thinking, our decision-making and our exchanges with each other. What *are* we looking for? What *do* we need? What *are* we hungry for? We have a much better chance of finding it if we actually know the answer to those questions.

But there's more than just the answer to the questions. Those who have just encountered Jesus...who have sought him out because they are curious...ask *him* a question. "Where are you staying?" they ask. Now they are not asking him for an address or the name of the family he's staying with or even where he has pitched his tent. They are asking much deeper questions...just as we should. Where can we go to find you, Jesus? Where do we need to be to be dwelling with you? Where can we go to find your undying love? Where shall we go to be in the very presence of God? They want to know...just as we do...where they can find the enduring, permanent, eternal, undying dwelling place of this Lamb of God.

The answer is in spending time with Jesus. Get to know Jesus in the Scriptures. Spend time with Jesus in prayer. Spend time with people also searching for Jesus. Read about other people's experiences with Jesus. Seek him out. He's not elusive. He's not trying to hide from you. He wants to be found by you. He wants to be found by all of us. He is the source of all love and each of us has known love in our lives. We know what it feels like to be emotionally, psychologically and sometimes even physically close to another human being. It's a mystical, almost magical, connection that we could never explain but one that is very powerful for each one of us. During this Epiphany season we are celebrating and focusing on the fact that Jesus came to us as another human being...the very essence of God...the incarnation of God in a human body. Through our experiences with other humans we have all known someone who made us feel accepted; someone who made us feel loved; someone who lent us their courage; someone who helped us experience forgiveness. These are all qualities that God offers to us through Jesus as well as through other human beings. The difference with Jesus is that Jesus never makes a mistake or a misstep. Jesus never leads us the wrong way or offers us the

opposite of what we really need. Jesus gets it right. Jesus knows us as no other human being possibly can.

When John calls Jesus the Lamb of God, he is not referring to Jesus as a poor creature with no will or agency of its own. The Paschal lamb was the sacrificial lamb of the Hebrews in Egypt. The Paschal lamb was the lamb that was slaughtered and whose blood was painted on the doors of all the Jewish households so the angel of death would pass over those houses and save all the Jewish firstborn. But that lamb had nothing to say about its fate or its sacrifice. Jesus does. Jesus isn't without will or agency. Jesus is not the sacrificial lamb in the way the Jewish Paschal lamb was. Jesus' sacrifice was voluntary. His death lifted up the sins of the whole world and made the capacity for ugliness in human beings visible for everyone to see. His death was a gift, not a sacrifice. His death was the gift that reconnected we poor wayward human beings to a God that loves us more than any of us can possibly imagine. All we know about God and about Jesus is that they are the essence of love. They are present in every moment of love that we experience in this life and there is an inexhaustible supply available when we are with them.

Among the many mysteries of the person of Jesus is that he is both the lamb of God and the Good Shepherd. He lays down his life for us...a lamb to the slaughter...and he also watches out for us. He fills those needs that we bring to him and he fills the ones we aren't even aware of. He created us and loves us as no other entity can...human or not. So when John the Baptist bellows out, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!" we know that the very essence of God...the very heart of love...is before us. All we need do is follow him wherever he goes...to keep him in sight always...to petition him for our daily bread...to learn from his words...to accept his forgiveness and allow him to cherish us. No one ever has or ever will love us the way Jesus does...the way God does.

Thanks be to God.  
AMEN.