**1/15/23**

**What’s in a Name?**

**John 1:29-42**

I want to start out this morning with an interesting fact that some of you may or may not realize. Believe it or not, the topic actually came up while we were here unpacking food from the Postal Carrier’s Drive last night. As we were talking about several things and working throughout the Fellowship Hall we realized there would not be trash pick-up in part of the Villas on Monday in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day. Now, I do not want to minimize the importance of this day in any shape, way, or form. However, it brought to light a minor inconvenience as we realized several people are off of work to honor and remember his life’s work. It has also become a day that we might also find it more annoying to realize that we have other temporary inconveniences due to banks being closed, and not receiving or being able to send mail that day either. However, do we really think about and commemorate Martin Luther King, Jr. like we should? This man’s life’s work should be something that leads us to be awe inspired. Most of us can without a doubt say that he was most famously remembered for his “I Have a Dream Speech.” However, Martin Luther King, Jr. was much more than that! “He was an American prophet of justice among races and nations, a Christian whose faith undergirded his advocacy of vigorous yet nonviolent action for racial equality. He preached nonviolence and demanded that love be returned for hate.” (1) Now, that interesting fact that I eluded to in the beginning was that “King's Birth Name was actually Michael, Not Martin. King was born Michael King Jr. on January 15, 1929. In 1934, however, his father, a Pastor at Atlanta’s Ebenezer Baptist Church, traveled to Germany and became inspired by the Protestant Reformation leader Martin Luther. As a result, King Sr. changed his own name as well as that of his five-year-old.” (2) What a “Come and see” moment for sure, just like in our Gospel Reading today! What a name change, just like that at the very end of our Gospel Reading today too!

“People of all ages come to church to learn, listen, worship, and encounter Jesus.” (1) Just like Martin Luther King, Juniors’ Father went to Germany and had an experience, we too seek that same experience in our church walls every week that we gather. After all, we want to be moved…. Don’t we? We also want to be inspired…. Don’t we?

With today’s message we follow that of last week’s baptismal message. We all come to the font to be anointed into this family of believers, just like Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River by John. This week’s message brings about John the Baptist further identifying Jesus as the “Lamb of God.” If you remember last week’s story told us that the skies opened during Jesus’ baptism, and that the Holy Spirit descended upon him in the form of a dove. However, not everyone was there to see it, and even for that fact they might have been in so much awe that they did not even understand or really grasp what was actually going on.

So, in this week’s Gospel Reading we get John speaking up and vocalizing to his followers who Jesus really is. Yes, sometimes things need to be seen, and sometimes things need to be heard in order to raise our belief. John’s followers got both! You are also getting to experience both yet again today as you sit in these very pews and hear these stories.

So, let us bring things into a little more context here. “The next day John sees Jesus and identifies Jesus as the Lamb of God. Two of John’s disciples hear this and follow Jesus and begin to ask him questions. Rather than have a long theological discussion with these disciples, Jesus issues a simple invitation, “Come and See.” After a few hours with Jesus, the disciples were telling people that they had found the Messiah.” (3)

“So they went and saw where he was staying, and spent that day with him. It was about the tenth hour. This was so important to them that they now knew and stood in the presence of the Lamb of God. Not only did they remember the day, they remembered the hour. It was about four-o-clock in the afternoon, the hour that they had met face to face with the Lamb of God. It was the time that they had given up following John and began following Jesus.” (4)

“We learn an important point in this brief scenario. We learn that Christianity is more than a list of theological principles, and greater than a set of prescribed religious rituals. Being a child of God and a follower of Jesus Christ is experiential. Accepting Jesus’ invitation, we follow him and in doing so we see, hear, touch, taste and smell what life, mission, and ministry are like with Jesus. We are immersed in the experience of God. The Holy Spirit uses our encounter with the divine to transform the shapes of our lives, to modify our perspectives, and to enthuse us for witness and service.” (3)

Alright, let me slow my roll here a little bit. How about I offer a story I read during my Sermon research this week that I thought was pretty interesting?

“A tourist visited a church in Germany and was surprised to see the carved figure of a lamb near the top of the church’s tower. He asked why it was there and was told that when the church was being built, a workman fell from a high scaffold. His co-workers rushed down, expecting to find him dead. But to their surprise and joy, he was alive and only slightly injured.” (5)

One might ask… “How did he survive? A flock of sheep was passing beneath the tower scaffold at the time, and the worker landed on top of a lamb. The lamb broke his fall and was crushed to death, but the man was saved. To commemorate that miraculous escape, someone carved a lamb on the tower at the exact height from which the workman fell.” (5)

Unfortunately, “The source of that story is unknown, and, whether it is simply legend or truth, it still bears out one fact: we need a lamb for our survival. WE NEED A LAMB! 1) who is named by God, 2) to snatch away our sins, and also 3) to redirect lives.” (5)

What a story! Right? What a way to think of Jesus, as someone constantly breaking our falls. He is always there for us, and there to pick us back up. He is there to put us back on the right path towards him. Jesus continually saves us! He is just like the lamb in this very story that saved this man from a fall that undoubtedly would have claimed his life in any other situation or scenario.

Yes, after all we are typically reminded that “lambs are helpless creatures. They’re born virtually defenseless. Lambs also tend to be awkward and clumsy. They seem to have a knack for getting into trouble. Why in the world would John refer to Jesus as the Lamb of God? Could it be that he was implying that Jesus was weak or unimpressive? No. The opposite is true. This was actually a prestigious title; which John the Baptist had given. To appreciate the significance means we must understand how the Jewish people perceived a lamb.” (5)

Unfortunately, “That illustration of Lamb of God is a little bit lost on us. In the Old Testament many people brought lambs week after week and year after year to be sacrificed for their sins. You may have heard of the term "scapegoat." One day of the year, the great Day of Atonement, a goat would be brought and the high priest would lay his hands on that goat signifying the laying of the sins of all of the people upon that goat. Then the goat would be released to take away the sins of the children of Israel. When John the Baptist called Jesus the Lamb of God, the people listened. They knew right away that this person was important, because He would remove sins.” (4)

Just as the disciples did then, and as his disciples now, we get to experience our lamb. We get the full benefits of having our lamb by our side, and more importantly in our hearts. However, we are urged not to keep him to ourselves!

“In our lifetime of believing we have grown to appreciate the fact that Christ has died for our sins. There are people all around us who don’t have that same appreciation.” (4) “We live in a world filled with people who don’t see Jesus. Some deny his existence and blind themselves to his presence. Others are looking for Jesus in all the wrong places. We know how to see Jesus, and when we see him we can go and tell others, “We have seen the Lord,” and invite them to come and see him with us.” (3) “The Lord reminds us to look and see the Lamb of God who takes away our sins. Our Lord reminds us to look and see the Lamb of God and imitate his love by telling others that their sins are also forgiven – that Jesus loves them.” (4)

We can look on things in a simpler way, but not forget all that we have been taught. We can share with others by truly living and loving like Jesus. We can be like Martin Luther King, Jr. and return love for hate. We just need to be reminded, and remind others that “Jesus says, “Come, see.” In other words, watch me, and you will see what and who is my dwelling place and holds my life.” (1) Jesus urges each and everyone one of us through a simple invitation to come home. So, let us share that with one another, and follow our call.

Amen.

**References**

(1) SundaysandSeasons.com

Sunday, January 15, 2023

Second Sunday after Epiphany

Lectionary 2, Year A

(2) history.com

10-things you may not know about Martin Luther King Jr

(3) SermonCentral.com

Come And See Series

Contributed by Kevin Ruffcorn on Jan 17, 2011

Scripture: John 1:29-42

Denomination: Lutheran

(4) SermonCentral.com

Look, The Lamb Of God Who Takes Away The Sin Of The World!

Contributed by Timm Meyer on Jan 19, 2004

Scripture: John 1:29-41

Denomination: Lutheran

(5) SermonCentral.com

We Need A Lamb!

Contributed by Edward Frey on Jan 18, 2002

Scripture: John 1:29-41

Denomination: Lutheran

**John 1:29-42**

John the Baptist’s witness to Jesus initiates a chain of testimony as his disciples begin to share with others what they have found.

29[John the Baptist] saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! 30This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.’ 31I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel.” 32And John testified, “I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. 33I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ 34And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God.”

35The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, 36and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, “Look, here is the Lamb of God!” 37The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. 38When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, “What are you looking for?” They said to him, “Rabbi” (which translated means Teacher), “where are you staying?” 39He said to them, “Come and see.” They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o’clock in the afternoon. 40One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. 41He first found his brother Simon and said to him, “We have found the Messiah” (which is translated Anointed). 42He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, “You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas” (which is translated Peter).