

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

Second Sunday after Epiphany - Year A

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

Isaiah 49:1-7

Psalm 40:1-11

I Corinthians 1:1-9

John 1:29-42

01/19/2020

Gospel

The Holy Gospel according to St. John:

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).
The Gospel of our Lord.

Prayer

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

What Are You Looking For?

Good morning! The text we have today is... well, strange. Or at least it seems that way to me. Let’s start with the placement of the text within the season of Epiphany. The day of Epiphany occurs on January 6th with the arrival of the Magi. The “season after Epiphany,” or the season of Epiphany occurs over the following Sundays and ends before the Transfiguration. We begin with the Magi, and then the next week (which was last week), we have the Baptism of Jesus. If you swing by next Sunday we’ll have Matthew’s account of the calling of the disciples. Which leaves us with today’s story... a story after Jesus’ baptism and before his calling of the disciples that’s about... his baptism and his calling of some disciples? Then there is the actual story itself. What you

heard me read is the cleaned up version. The text actually begins in the middle of a story and doesn't actually tell us who is talking. It just says "*the next day he saw Jesus coming toward him...*"¹ The powers that be didn't feel it was necessary to explain what happened the day before, or who was talking. And then there is the content of John the Baptist's speech! I'll be honest, I am not an intelligent person, so it takes me some time to puzzle out what he's trying to say. All the passive voice in the text serves the purpose of placing the emphasis on Jesus, which is theologically correct, but grammatically confusing!

With my rant over, it's time to ask the obvious question: what point does the story serve? What does this text tell us about God? The answer lies in the season of Epiphany. You see, the Church in the East and the West have chosen to place different emphases on different seasons. The church in the West was originally the Catholic Church but includes the Protestant branches now too. The church in the East is the Orthodox Church like Russian and Greek Orthodox. Here in the West the church decided to focus on the birth of Jesus and the celebration of Christmas. In the East they went the opposite direction. It was the season of Epiphany that became important.² To oversimplify church history, the reason makes a lot of sense. Who is this guy Jesus? Whereas Christmas focuses on the birth of Jesus, it tells us very little about who he is. On the other hand, as he grows older we are able to learn more about him. The Magi tell us that he is King. Jesus' baptism in the river Jordan tells us that he is God's son, and that Jesus is beloved. In the coming weeks we will hear from the Sermon on the Mount,

¹ John 1:29 NRSV

² Bartlett, David L., and Barbara B. Taylor. *Feasting on the Word Year A, Vol. 1*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008. p. 262.

thus telling us even more about what Jesus finds important. But today, John the Baptist tells us that Jesus is the Lamb of God. As one commentator points out: *“The image of a ‘lamb’ often communicates a weak, vulnerable animal ready for sacrifice or slaughter. However, as it is used here and in some other Jewish writings, the lamb is powerful. The lamb reigns in the heavens... and secure salvation for the righteous.”*³

It’s this idea of finding out who Jesus is that I kept thinking about. And almost in direct response, Jesus asks that wonderful question in verse 38: “What ARE you looking for?” Man that’s good, isn’t it?! What are we looking for? We have supposedly grown up in a Christian society, and some of us have spent most of our lives in the church, is it possible that the Jesus we’re looking for isn’t the real one?

When I was a Younglife leader we did mini-sermons that were called ‘talks.’ Creative, right? These talks usually have a few different areas of focus and the first several talks of the year were always the same, about the person of Jesus Christ. Younglife didn’t assume that any of the high school students knew who Jesus was, and so they told biblical stories that were at the heart of Jesus’ message and ministry. Epiphany becomes the same sort of “person of Christ” season.

This, I would argue, serves a major need in our lives. It’s like we have forgotten who Jesus is, or more likely, we never really knew him in the first place. As a pastor, it has become increasingly frustrating to see how God, religion, and Christianity are portrayed in our popular culture. Movies and TV shows make no mention of God’s grace, and make the most basic of mistakes! One of my favorite shows, *Supernatural*, made the cardinal mistake of adding an ‘s’ to the last book of the Bible for an entire

³ Ibid, p. 263.

season! It's Revelation! Not Revelations! I cringed every single time they did it! Or how about horror movies? They throw up one verse of apocalyptic text, from Daniel or Revelation, and create some demon child that's supposedly the spawn of Satan. More generally, Christianity is presented as a religion in which God resembles Santa Claus. Those that are on the nice list go to heaven, and those that have been naughty go to hell. We've literally taken the Good News of Jesus Christ and twisted it into the very thing that it came to free us from!

So what do we do then? If we've gotten so much about Jesus wrong where do we even start? Well, my friends, I'm glad you asked! The season of Epiphany is where we begin! Put your preconceived notions of who God is aside and over the next weeks let's learn together from the life of Jesus Christ. So many people have spoken incorrectly about God that it can be overwhelming, but as we turn to the actual text, we'll see the truth behind the mythos. Jesus has asked each and everyone of us "what are we looking for?" And as we stood in uncertainty, unsure of what what we came to see, Jesus responds in love, inviting us to "come and see." Amen.