

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

Second Sunday after Epiphany - Year A

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

Isaiah 49:1-7

Psalms 40:1-11

I Corinthians 1:1-9

John 1:29-42

01/15/2023

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.

The Names of God

Good morning! I had a dilemma this week. When you read the Gospel text it's most easily broken down into two stories. The first is John's recollection of the baptism of Jesus. The other is the calling of the first disciples. If I went with the first one, you all might think that I was suggesting that Vicar Lucas didn't do a thorough enough job last week and that maybe I was clarifying something. (That's not true, Vicar Lucas did a great job, I enjoyed his sermon.) I couldn't have that, so I went a different direction... which had me thinking of the 2006 comedy *Talladega Nights: The Ballad of Ricky Bobby*. The movie has one infamous scene where the family gathers around the table to pray, only for an argument to break out. Ricky prefers praying to the infant Jesus, claiming that he likes the "baby version the best," while others try to point out that Jesus was a full grown man. Cal, Ricky's friend "likes to picture Jesus singing lead vocals for Lynyrd Skynyrd, with an angel choir for backup vocals."

Now, as outrageous as the scene is, at the time, it was used a lot to illustrate a similar point to what is made in our Gospel reading... whether right or wrong, we all see God, and specifically Jesus, as different things.

For race car driver Ricky Bobby, it's the baby Jesus, for St. John, it's the Lamb of God, or Son of God. For the first disciples, it's Rabbi, or Messiah.

One of the problems we have is that we're dealing with over 2,000 years of explanations and teachings about who Jesus was. When you hear the same titles over and over, they all tend to merge together. It can be hard for us to separate the different understandings and expectations of the titles that are given for Jesus. At the end of the day, we just sort of assume they all mean Jesus, and leave it at that. But I think it's important to spend some time breaking down these different titles.

Bear with me, because I'm going to need to simplify these. Entire books have been written on each one of these titles, so we'll need to paint with a large brush here. The first title in our reading today is "Son of God." It's important to remember that we're specifically focusing on the understanding we can get from the Gospel of John. Other pieces of scripture choose to emphasize or unpack this title in different ways. Scholars point out that this title seems to bear some similarities to "Messiah," but what differs here is the emphasis and understanding of the word "son." You all of course already know that the Gospel of John starts off completely different from the other Gospels with a prologue that borrows heavily from the first creation story in Genesis. This Gospel was the last of the four written, and so we can clearly see a more developed theology that places Jesus as the "Word," part of God at the very beginning of it all.

The second title is extremely unique. Lamb of God is only used here in the Gospel of John. In no other gospels will you find this title. (Here's another unrelated detail, St. John is not called John the Baptist in this Gospel either.) But John announces loudly that Jesus is the Lamb of God.

Lambs were sacrificed daily in the Temple, and any Jew would have instantly drawn connections with the Passover story in Egypt.

The third title is “Rabbi,” which means teacher. It may be tempting to assume that this is the most simple, but I think that it carried a great deal of weight for those first disciples. A rabbi was a very prestigious role. In the First Century they operated as judge, professor, lawyer, healer, and faith leader. It also offered the chance of a better life for any potential disciples. They would leave their previous careers and follow the rabbi, learning and hopefully one day going off to teach others as a rabbi themselves.

The final title is probably the one we’re most familiar with. “Christ.” No, this wasn’t Jesus’ last name. It’s the Greek word for the Hebrew word “messiah,” and it means “anointed.” In college my undergrad religious professor explained it as meaning literally “smothered in oil.” Anointing was how Israel “crowned” their king, and messiah was the title given to King David. Over time this word took on a deeper and more powerful understanding to mean the one who would deliver the Jews from whatever foreign power was occupying them at that time.

In just 250 words the writer of the Gospel of John has given us enough material to fill a modern library with discussion of who Jesus was and is. So... what do we do with all this? If you’re like me, at first you felt overwhelmed. But then I read something from a 2nd century Bishop that made me realize that all of these titles are just expressions of something we don’t, nor ever will, understand. What they ultimately describe is larger than what mere words can encompass. The vastness of God defies all metrics! But these titles, these words, help us to get started. They become a seat in which we can rest and begin our contemplation. And in that moment we realize that maybe just BEING with God was part of the plan all along...

So listen to the words Melito of Sardis and sit in the presence of a God who loves you deeply.

“The Scripture of the exodus of the Hebrews has been read, and the words of the mystery have been declared: How the sheep was sacrificed, and how the people was saved, and how Pharaoh was flogged by the mystery.

Therefore, well-beloved, understand, how the mystery of the Pascha is both new and old, eternal and provisional, perishable and imperishable, mortal and immortal...

The sheep is perishable, but the Lord, not broken as a lamb but raised up as God, is imperishable. For though led to slaughter like a sheep, he was no sheep. Though speechless as a lamb, neither yet was he a lamb. For there was once a type, but now the reality has appeared.

For instead of the lamb there was a son, and instead of the sheep a man; in the man was Christ encompassing all things... for he was born a son, and led as a lamb, and slaughtered as a sheep, and buried as a man, and rose from the dead as God, being God by his nature and a man.

He is all things... He is son, in that he is begotten. He is sheep, in that he suffers. He is human in that he is buried. He is God, in that he is raised up. This is Jesus the Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever.

Amen.”¹

¹ Oden, Thomas C. *John 1-10. Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament IVa*. Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2003. p. 70.