

# "Remaining with Him"

John 1:29-42

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## **John 1:29-42**

The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.' I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel." And John testified, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I 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.' And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God."

The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!" The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. When 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?" He 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. One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated Anointed). He 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).

## Prayer

Our Gospel lesson for today is John, the first chapter, verses 29 through 42. This is the final installment of the "John the Baptist stories" for the year. I do not like preaching on John the Baptist through Advent, even though I am a Lectionary preacher ... that is, I follow the orthodox three year cycle to cover the majority of the Bible. Every Advent, the gospel Lectionary passages are focused on the John the Baptist stories and, quite frankly, I'd grown tired of John the Baptist crying out in the wilderness.

The neighborly, hospitable part of me wants to shout back, "Come on in, John, and get out of the cold." "You look underfed, like you've been surviving on bugs and

honey. Let me warm you up with some hot soup!"

In other years I took time to preach off the gospel and to explore the Isaiah texts, where I greatly enjoy an occasional shift of focus. Though we will hear an echo of today's lesson come Good Friday when we hear the words, "Behold, the Lamb of God," today's lesson concludes the passages from the lectionary regarding John the Baptist.

In the verses leading up to our lesson, we learn that on the previous day the Jews had sent from Jerusalem priests and Levites to investigate John's preaching and actions. They wanted to know who John was - "are you the Messiah?" "... Elijah?" "No." "Well then, who?" John replies, citing the words of the prophet Isaiah, "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord.'" (John 1:22)

The next day, our Gospel this morning picks up the trail, spanning two days. First, John is doing what he was sent to do - to testify, to witness to who Jesus is and what Jesus had come to do.

The WHO: "Here is the Lamb of God," John proclaims.

WHAT: "Who takes away the sin of the world."

Then, the second day of our Gospel, John steps back in v.35-42 and watches the results of his witness, the process of discipleship taking place. Jesus calls many of his remaining disciples. John's job is completed and we don't hear anything further about him in this Gospel.

It is fascinating to me that our Gospel author records 10 different descriptive names for Jesus in a 22-verse stretch, including 5 different names in our passage today. He calls him "Lamb of God," "this is the Son of God," "Rabbi / Teacher," "the Messiah," and, of course, "Jesus." It certainly speaks to the reality of God in Jesus, a vast conception that goes beyond mere words. It goes beyond titles and categories, doctrines or creed. The fullness of the Divine identity goes beyond our ability to understand, making it more cosmic and universal than even the stars. This is our Gospel author's quiet way of granting us permission to consider God more than just the familiar: Father, Creator, Redeemer, or Spirit.

I'd like to focus on two points in John today: first, John's witness. Secondly, as a result of John's witness, Jesus calls and converts his disciples.

### I. John's Witness.

This is who Jesus is, John proclaims, "he is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." Using the term lamb should bring to mind Isaiah's Servant Song, found in Isaiah 53:7 - "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open

his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth." John is laying a foundation here, one that will serve the passion and death of Jesus, yet to come.

The image of the lamb should also bring to mind the Passover Lamb. To the Jew of Jesus' day, lambs symbolized deliverance, divine deliverance from Egyptian captivity. Remember how God comes to Moses in the dream<sup>1</sup> and tells him to have every Hebrew family slaughter a lamb, to place their blood upon their door casement, so that when the angel of death is sent to kill the children of Pharaoh? It will know to pass-over the homes that are marked with the blood of the lamb. The lambs gave their lives that God's chosen might live. What a powerful symbol John uses.

This *Lamb of God* takes away the sin of the world. Not individual sin, mind you. John isn't quite so specific. John is intentionally universal. This is the one who wipes the world clean of their sin. He is the solution to the original sin of Adam. By his blood, we are all washed clean. By the blood of Jesus, we are all healed.

John continues by clarifying his witness. In verse 30 he said that Jesus is the pre-existent one; that is, the one sent by God, and John the Baptist was called to simply prepare the way for him. "After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me."

Furthermore, Jesus is the bearer of the Holy Spirit. John witnessed it with his own eyes. He says "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him." John is convinced at his baptism. John is confirmed when the Spirit lights upon him.

Jesus is the one who has given his life purpose. God sent John specifically to ready the way for Jesus. God's voice, and Spirit, were proof enough. John concludes his witness in the 34th verse by naming Jesus "the Son of God." He says, "I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God." In John's eyes, this is the Divine Reality – Jesus is God's Son. He is also a man, one who he baptized.

John recognizes that Jesus is the substance of God, yet the flesh of man. And John had paved the way for him to come.

## II. Discipleship: the Result of Witness

The second half of today's account takes place the following day; the day after John's first witness. Today, while standing with two of his disciples (two of John's

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<sup>1</sup> Exodus 12:23

disciples, that is), John would identify Jesus again, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!" (John 1:36) The result is dramatic. It is immediate. In a flash of a millisecond, those who experience the witness of Jesus Christ complete *a thought process that begins with hearing and ends with belief*. "The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus." (v.37)

When people learn who Jesus is, they are converted to follow him and serve as His disciples. Thankfully, this immediate conversion process has been going on for 2,000 years!

John records that it began with Andrew and another unnamed disciple of John the Baptist. They HEARD John's witness, they INQUIRED further, they EXPERIENCED Jesus for themselves, they BELIEVED, and in turn, they WITNESSED to another, Andrew's brother, Simon. Understanding this process is critical to us today as we wrestle with the question, **"How are we to bring others to Christ and the fullness of His Kingdom?"**

1. First things first. The process of conversion takes place by somebody hearing a witness. They heard John's witness. In today's lesson, disciples of John heard their master witness to the fact that Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, and that He is God's Son. John lifted up Jesus' identity, and let God do the rest.

What this means for us today is the fact that the Good News cannot be spread unless we make the effort to share it. Likewise, it will not be received by people who are unwilling to hear it.

I believe our job is like that of John the Baptist; we lift up the name of Jesus, point the way to Christ by both our words and our deeds, and leave the rest up to God. God will find a way. God will open people's hearts. It is God's desire that we witness to His Son.

Much of the problem the Church faces today is rooted fundamentally in our failure to witness, and to witness effectively. We've become so distracted by social issues or worship style or by slick media campaigns that promise "to do it all for us" that we overlook our core values as disciples of Jesus. One of the most important Christian value there is, is to lift high the precious name of Jesus, and to witness with the invitation,

*Come, all ye souls by sin oppressed, ye restless wanderers after rest; ye poor, and maimed, and halt, and blind, in Christ a hearty welcome find.*<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Wesley, Charles, "Come, Sinners, to the Gospel Feast, Hymn number 339, The United Methodist Hymnal, 1989.

2. Secondly, the disciples ran after Jesus and inquired where he was staying. "Come and see," Jesus invited. The cynic might suggest they were asking Jesus where He was spending the night. But I think they are asking a deeper question, "Where do you abide, Jesus? Do you abide with the Father? Just what is your relationship with God?"

Who will answer the inquiry of seeking disciples today? We will! We are the Body of Christ today. We are His Body, his flesh and blood, present in our world. We need to have the answer ready to be delivered, "Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. Nobody comes to the Father, except through him."

The only way any one of us can deliver this message with confidence to a hungry world searching for answers, is if Jesus first abides in each and every one of our hearts. The world can not stand, and will not tolerate, phony Christians ... those of us who "talk the talk, but can't walk the walk," or those of us who are go to church Christians on Sunday, but mean, dirty sinners the other six days of the week.

Jesus abides in the Father. But is he also abiding in your heart? Can you wear him on your sleeve? Are his words on your lips? Can you see the world as if you are looking through his eyes?

3. Thirdly, the seeking disciples experienced Jesus for themselves. "They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day." (John 1:39). Remaining with him: Nothing can substitute for establishing and maintaining a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

Today we do this through regular worship, prayer, sacraments, proclamation, and reflection. We do this by going on retreats, summer camp, or workshops. We take part in rallies, conferences, and opportunities like Walk to Emmaus or Lay Speakers school.

The journey of faith begins with a personal relationship with Jesus, but to keep it alive and growing, it must be grafted to the Vine. It must become an active and vital part of the network, the Body of Christ.

Jesus didn't mentor twelve independent contractors. He brought together twelve disciples into a community, a small group of committed followers, such that the total exceeded the sum of the parts.

Don't let anyone tell you that they can be a Christian in isolation, by "not succumbing to organized religion," as I've often heard it. Or, "I can worship God just by walking though the woods or seeing a beautiful sunset and appreciating

creation." Baloney!

Independent Christians die on the vine. This is the chaff Jesus speaks of, which is gathered and thrown into the fire.

The faithful disciple of Jesus gathers with the other eleven at the feet of Jesus to learn his ways and to be charged with his will. The faithful disciple becomes a part of the Body of Christ, to receive the benefit of mutual strength and love.

4. Fourthly, as a result of their experience, their personal encounter with Jesus Christ, the disciples of John believed in Jesus. They switched their loyalties, and left everything to follow Him. This affirms the fact that it is never too late to turn to Jesus.

Never give up hope! Don't stop lifting up Jesus just because you might believe that it's a lost cause. There is no such thing as a lost cause to God! It's never too late for the Moslem, the Jew, the Mormon, or the Scientologist. It's never too late for the atheist, the agnostic, or the cold of heart. It's never too late for the drug addicted, the alcoholic, the bully, or the self-absorbed.

Just as it is a principle of marketing to maintain a regular, consistent marketing presence to achieve desired results, so too is it true with our witness. Nine out of ten times our words will fall on deaf ears. Our seeds will be sown on rocky ground, and no fruit will be born. But it is not all for naught! Because we are confident that results will come on the tenth effort, or the ninety-ninth effort, or the nine hundred, ninety-ninth effort.

Never give up hope! Maintain the constant, sustained effort to lift high the precious name of Jesus. Do not tire or grow faint! And our efforts will pay off in the end. Sometimes we may never see the successful results of our witness, for God's plans so exceed our comprehension. But rest assured, our Savior takes note of our every effort on his behalf.

6. Lastly, discipleship comes around full circle when the converted, in turn, witness to someone new, lifting up Christ for yet even more people. "We have found the Messiah!" they shout to Simon. Discipleship is always incomplete without sharing your witness; testifying to others the reality of Jesus Christ in your life.

The sinner that, by the assistance of your witness, comes to repentance and conversion today, may not be the next Martin Luther King, Jr. or the next Billy Graham. But they may be the one who witnesses 40 years from now and, as a result of their witness, the next King David, John the Baptist, or Paul the Apostle is called forth, and God's kingdom is completed.

Have a little faith in our God! Even if your personal experience is more closely related to Job than it is to one of the great evangelist of the Church, your efforts are not lost! On the contrary- every effort to witness to the precious name of Jesus is counted and judged as righteousness by our eternal Lord.

I am struck by the actions of John the Baptist in our lesson for today. His actions, more than any others, reveal the division between wheat and chaff, between righteousness or being shut out in utter darkness where there is gnawing and gnashing of teeth.

At the start of each day, he looks at Jesus and proclaims "Here is the Lamb of God." Likewise, I can't help but wonder how Jesus will greet each of us. Will he proclaim to the heavenly realm, "Behold, a disciple of mine! Well done good and faithful servant. Enter now and receive thy eternal rewards" or will he observe, "I was thirsty and you did not give me a drink"?

My beloved, witness to the reality of Jesus in your life. Lift him up for all to see and hear. Encourage questions and inquiries. Be the ones who are called to lead others into Christ centered relationships, that they might also believe. And when they turn and pass on the baton one day to the next generation, the same baton you passed to them, listen for the whisper, the whisper of God in you ear, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

The Word of the Lord, as it has come to me. Thanks be to God. Amen.