

January 19th, 2020

John 1:29-42 “Behold the Lamb”

I know I’ve told this joke before, but it’s been awhile. I also know we have new members since the last time I told it, so here it is again. There was this church that called a new pastor after their last one retired. They hired her because she interviewed well, she had impressive credentials, and great references. Plus she didn’t need health insurance because her husband already had some. She also had 2.5 well behaved children – one who played piano and the other who had experience directing choirs. But most of all, she was an outstanding preacher, and that’s what the church believed it needed. So on her first Sunday, she gets up in the pulpit and preaches this incredible sermon on the Great Commission from Matthew 28 ... “Go ye therefore into all the world and make disciples!” The sermon was amazing. *She* was amazing! The people seemed very pleased with their decision to call her although they were rather subdued in their reaction to her sermon. I mean, heaven forbid they interrupt her flow with “amens” and “hallelujahs” right?

The next week, the congregation was a little bigger. Word had gotten out that she was a good preacher, so the following week some of the Christmas and Easter only crowd showed up to check her out. And sure enough, she got up into the pulpit with the confidence of one who is steeped in the gospel and filled with the Holy Spirit and she started to preach. Matthew 28:18 – 20. Jesus commissions his disciples to go into the world and make disciples. There were three or four folks in the congregation who thought, “Wait a minute. This sounds vaguely familiar.” But her delivery was so spot on that people laughed in all the right places, cried in all the right places and throughout her sermon they smiled and nodded which, in a mostly white, mainline Protestant steeple church was the equivalent of raised hands and amens in a mega-church!

Week number three came along, and the sanctuary was almost three-quarters full, which again ... for a mainline Protestant steeple church is *stunning*! The Christmas and Easter crowd actually *returned* to join the

regulars. Once again she approached the pulpit. Matthew 28:18-20. Jesus commissions his disciples to go into all the world and make disciples. Hmmm. This week people started nervously shuffling in their pews because they were thinking, “Now ... I *know* I’ve heard this before. And unless my mind is playing tricks on me, I’m pretty sure this is the same sermon she preached last week. And maybe even the week before.” It was still delivered skillfully and passionately and the new folks were laughing and crying in all the right places, but the folks who had been there the week before look bewildered and thought, “This sounds familiar.”

By week four the crowd that gathered at the church was rather subdued. They were wondering what she was going to preach about. Take a guess - Matthew 28:18-20. The great commission. Okay, now people were catching on. For sure, this was the same sermon ... almost verbatim ... as they’d heard for the past three weeks. After worship, an ad hoc committee of folks who grew up in the church met in the parking lot. The consensus was, “Yup. She’s been preaching the same sermon every week. What should we do?” Well ... we don’t know! Well what if she preaches it again? They agreed that if she did, the Board Chair and the Chair of the Elders ought to have a word with her afterward. So the following week, the church gathered for morning worship. There was none of the usual chitter chatter before church. Just a bunch of silent people waiting to see what would happen. Will their new preacher preach something different this week? Or will she preach the same sermon again? She stepped into the pulpit. Matthew 28:18-20 again. Word ... for ... word. After church, the Board Chair and the Elder Chair approached her. “We’ve noticed that you’ve used the same text for the last five weeks.” “Yes,” she said. “We’ve also noticed that you’ve preached the same sermon for the past five weeks.” “That is also correct.” “Well when are we going to get a new sermon?” She smiled and said, “As soon as you actually do what I’ve been preaching you should do!”

That being said, I want you to take note of the scripture that Georgeanne read. You may be thinking, “Wait a minute ... didn’t we hear about John the Baptist baptizing Jesus last week?” Yes you did. But that was Matthew’s version. We’ve got the Gospel of John in front of us this week. And here’s the thing about John’s gospel – It doesn’t say *anything* about John being the one who baptized Jesus. What do you mean?! Of course it does! In verse 31 it says ... oh wait ... John is saying that his ministry is about baptizing with water so that Jesus would be revealed to Israel. Okay ... ooh! Here we go - Verse 32 ... John says he saw the Spirit descend from heaven onto Jesus! But it doesn’t say that he actually baptized Jesus. Alright, verse 33 says, “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.’” Yeah, but that still doesn’t indicate that John baptized Jesus. Remember what we talked about last week – Mark, Luke, and especially Matthew wanted their readers to understand the transference of John the Baptizer being God’s main voice in the wilderness to Jesus being the key player. So let’s take a look at what John wants *his* readers to notice.

John is the latest of the four gospels in terms of when it was written. John’s gospel was written sometime between 90 – 110 CE which is 50 – 60 years *after* Jesus’ earthly ministry ended. John’s readers already knew the story of Jesus as far as players and events are concerned. John could care less about the “what’s” of Jesus’ story. He doesn’t even follow the same time-line as the other three gospels. The other gospels are mostly about *what* Jesus said and did. John’s gospel is about *who* Jesus is in the big picture and *why* he came. The other gospels want to make a distinction between John who said, “My baptism is for repentance,” and Jesus who came to baptize in the Holy Spirit!” John’s gospel has the Baptizer saying, “I came baptizing so that Jesus *might be made known*.” Again, it’s all about the who and the why and not just the what and the how.

Here’s something I want you to notice about John’s gospel. Notice how many times just in the passage Georgeanne read today you see words

like, “Behold!” and “Look!” Or how many times John talks about seeking and finding. Then there are all the times throughout the gospel that John talks about seeing as it relates to knowing. In fact, the very climax of John’s Gospel is, “the ones who are truly blessed are the ones who never got to see but still believe.” Think about it – that’s exactly the kind of message that people who were alive 50-60 years after Jesus’ earthly ministry needed to hear. *Who* is this Jesus, who many call “The Christ” and *why* should we care? And right there in verse 36 of the passage we have in front of us this morning ... a day after John said all the things he knew about Jesus, we get to see what I think is at the heart of this passage. John was standing with two of his disciples. Not doing anything in particular ... just standing. And John sees Jesus walking toward them, and he tells the two disciples, “Look ... behold! Here is the Lamb of God!” Ah-hah! There’s what we’re looking for! There’s where you’re going! We were wondering when you were going to get around to it! “The Lamb of God!” That’s what it’s all about ... right there! This is where we can talk about how Jesus is the sacrificial lamb. This is where we get to talk about how he took on all of our sins ... all of *my* sins ... so that the world might be redeemed! And that ties into another book from the John Tradition - the Revelation of John. Here’s where we can turn to Revelation 5:12-13 where it says, “Then I looked, and I heard the voices of many angels and living creatures and elders encircling the throne, and their number was myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands. In a loud voice, they said, “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and riches and strength and honor and glory and blessing!” This is at the very heart of the communion liturgy in Catholic, Anglican, Orthodox and Lutheran traditions. *Agnus Dei*. “The Lamb of God.” “*Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi, dona nobis pacem.*” “Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, grant us peace.” Good job preacher. Thanks for reminding us.

Well ... yeah ... the lamb stuff is fine and all. And we’ll for sure tackle that when we start our Bible study on the John tradition in February. But you know what I think is the *most* important phrase in this whole passage? It’s down here in verse 37-39 after Jesus noticed that John’s

two disciples wanted to follow him. Jesus asked them a simple question – “What are you looking for?” They called him “Rabbi” which tells you right away, they were looking for a teacher. They asked where he was staying. Jesus replied, “Come and see.” For me, *that’s* what this passage is all about. “Come and See.” And the reason I think that’s so interesting is that John is the “I Am” gospel. All throughout the gospel Jesus is saying, “I am the bread of life,” “I am the door,” “I am the resurrection and the life,” “I am the good shepherd,” “I am the vine and you are the branches.” You sort of expect Jesus to say, “I am the Rabbi you’ve been looking for.” But instead, he says, “Come and see.”

Come and see what? This is an invitation to come in to listen and see. It’s evangelism by invitation. Not by command. Not by fear. But by inquiry. “What are you looking for? What are you trying to find?” What you are looking for ... and you may not even know what you’re looking for ... what you need can be found by coming and seeing. Come and be in relationship with me. Come and see and follow. And that’s what John’s disciples end up doing. They go and follow Jesus. In this Gospel, John the Baptizer is the one who sets the stage for what ministry is all about. Inviting others to come and see. When we talk about Jesus’ followers in the John tradition ... that’s how they grew both in numbers and in spirit. They invited people to come and see.

One final thing to consider. As a church, are we inviting people to come and see? Are there things worth seeing? If so, what are they? What’s happening in our community of faith? And if we believe that there’s something worth seeing are we making that call to see something that is worth following? It’s something we have to ask ourselves as we face the challenges of being the Body of Christ in the world. We need to continue to make that invitation and continue to be that thing worth seeing. Behold. Come and see.