

# Sermons at Union Congregational Church

Preached by The Reverend Gail L. Miller, Pastor

January 15, 2017

Second Sunday after Epiphany

John 1:29-42

## See and Tell

When we read the Bible and hear easy to understand stories like this one from John, sometimes it's fun to consider not just WHAT is being said, but the WAY in which it's being said.

There is a lot happening in this short passage. If I were to give it a one-sentence summary, I might say:

- Jesus is identified by John as the Lamb of God
- Or The disciples discover who Jesus is and follow him
- Or Jesus invites the disciples to follow him and renames Simon to Peter

What's interesting to me this week and this year is how this passage sounds compared to NEXT week's Gospel reading, which will be from Matthew, and which is ALSO about Jesus calling his disciples to follow him, and which is almost the opposite of how it goes here in John.

You see, when I imagine the way that Jesus called the disciples to follow him, I have this picture of Jesus in the village, or in the country, or by the lake, and people are with him, and are curious about him, and then at some point in the conversation, Jesus says, "Hey, come with me, follow me..." and the do!

Which is almost the way it happens NEXT week. (Because what I IMAGINE is not necessarily what the Bible says — it's important to remember that....)

And what I imagine is NOT at all the way it happens today!

I love that we get different versions of how the disciples came to hang out with Jesus.... Because that's how it still is....for us.... We come to follow Jesus in different ways!

And so this week and next week we'll look at two (of the many) ways that our journeys with Christ might begin — or if you're on the path of Jesus already, these are ways that we can see him, and be encouraged in our own following of Jesus.

After all, we're in the season of Epiphany, which means manifestation, which means the ways that God makes Jesus known to us — not just the way God MADE Jesus known back then, but the way WE discover, and know Jesus today.

So — our reading for today from the Gospel of John — listen to it again — a different translation (TLB) - and see if you can pick out how the whole start up for the disciples is different from how I imagine it....

*The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look! There is the Lamb of God who takes away the world's sin! He is the one I was talking about when I said, 'Soon a man far greater than I am is coming, who existed long before me!' I didn't know he was the one, but I am here baptizing with water in order to point him out to the nation of Israel."*

*Then John told about seeing the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove descending from heaven and resting upon Jesus.*

*"I didn't know he was the one," John said again, "but at the time God sent me to baptize he told me, 'When you see the Holy Spirit descending and resting upon someone—he is the one you are looking for. He is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' I saw it happen to this man, and I therefore testify that he is the Son of God."*

*The following day as John was standing with two of his disciples, Jesus walked by. John looked at him intently and then declared, "See! There is the Lamb of God!"*

*Then John's two disciples turned and followed Jesus. Jesus looked around and saw them following. "What do you want?" he asked them. "Sir," they replied, "where do you live?" "Come and see," he said. So they went with him to the place where he was staying and were with him from about four o'clock that afternoon until the evening. (One of these men was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother.) Andrew then went to find his brother Peter and told him, "We have found the Messiah!" And he brought Peter to meet Jesus. Jesus looked intently at Peter for a moment and then said, "You are Simon, John's son—but you shall be called Peter, the rock!"*

Did you hear it? The disciples begin to follow Jesus before he even speaks to them! What's with that???

What prompts, motivates, inspires, these two (Andrew and his friend) to follow Jesus when they haven't met him yet?

I love the answer to this question.... Do you see it?

It's the "testimony" of someone else — John the Baptist (who is not the same John as the one who wrote the Gospel). Now John the Baptist and Jesus are cousins, so when he says "I didn't know him" he doesn't mean he doesn't know him, he means that he doesn't know him to be revealed as the Son of God, the Anointed One, the Lamb of God — until NOW.

And John discovered this about Jesus — or Jesus was made manifest to him as the Son of God, the Anointed One, the Lamb of God — at Jesus' baptism. (The Holy Spirit had something to do with this discovery — which sounds familiar, doesn't it? The Holy Spirit arriving and making a revelation to a mere mortal about God arriving in human form?)

AND John can't help but spread the word! He is blabbing all over the place about Jesus — in fact it will contribute to getting him killed in just a few short months!

I have seen and testify! That's it... I have seen and testify!

And what he's testifying to is important: this one — Jesus — is the Lamb of God.

Lamb of God — it helps to know what he meant by this, and it might explain why Andrew and friend would go after him.

Lambs were sacrificed to God, and were (and still are) the centerpiece of the Passover meal.

This tradition comes from the story of the Exodus in the Bible. God helped the Children of Israel escape from slavery in Egypt by inflicting ten plagues upon the Egyptians before the Pharaoh would release his Israelite slaves; the tenth and worst of the plagues was the death of the Egyptian first-born.

The Israelites were instructed to mark the doorposts of their homes with the blood of a slaughtered spring lamb and, upon seeing this, the spirit of the Lord knew to pass over the first-born in these homes. The blood of the lamb SAVED them and led to their release from slavery.

The Israelites would also sacrifice animals to stay in a good relationship with God — they believed that when they had sinned or offended God, that by sacrificing animals and giving them back to God, God would forgive their sins.

Lambs had everything to do with having a good relationship with God.

God does His part — saves and forgives.

Humans do their part — sacrifice the lambs.

And then, along comes Jesus.... *The Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.*

So when John points to Jesus, and tells what he saw and heard and experienced, and calls him Lamb of God — it's enough!

John shared Christ and lives were changed. And that's how it goes sometimes. And for me this is really good news! Because I have not had a big conversion moment experience of Jesus. I don't always hear Jesus calling me to follow him.

My faith relies on your faith —

your experiences of the Holy Spirit

your experiences of prayers answered

your 'testimony' of times when the Lord provided just what you needed — though perhaps not what you expected...

And your faith probably relies on hearing similar stories of others.

Just this past Sunday at Confirmation Class the topic was the Holy Spirit. At the end of our time together, I read a story from Corrie Ten Boom (*The Hiding Place*) who survived a WWII concentration camp (she was a Christian who had been hiding Jews and got caught) and had a Holy Spirit experience many years after the war was over. It's a moving story — true and inspiring.

Then Pete, who teaches the class with me, told a story of a time when he experienced the Holy Spirit. It too is a moving story — true and inspiring.

And my faith grew in the hearing of it. I love this about — He can increase my faith through something that happened to someone else!

That's how it went 2,000 years ago as well. Andrew and Simon Peter devoted their lives to Christ because of what happened to someone else! No magic or miracles. No convincing or proving. Just "let me tell you what I saw happen to HIM." And they were off! The Christian faith grew because word spread.

Same with us. The Bible says that "no human had seen God."

Rather, God is "declared" to us, witnessed by people we know and people we hear about and read about.

So, do you want to feel stronger in your faith, more confident, encouraged?

Then hang close to someone who has a faith you admire,

Who can tell you a story or two...

Or read about Christians who've been around the block of struggle and strife and have retained or regained their faith.

And, likewise, have you experienced or seen God at work in your life or the world around you? Then tell someone about it!

I love conversations and phone calls that begin with — "You won't believe what happened!"

The power of your story — your sharing of Christ in this way will change lives.

How do I know that?

Because I read about it in a good book....

Amen!