

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

Next week we will hear Matthew's account of the calling of the first disciples, but this week we're hearing from John's gospel. It is a "book of signs." That is, things, events, and people who point to something else. Thus, in the passage, John the Baptist is pointing to Jesus. We know this is John's theme, because he tells us that his narrative is "written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah." The Greek word for "bearing witness" appears in John's gospel 31 times while it seldom appears at all in the other accounts. John "came as a *witness* to *bear witness* to the light." But first John points away from himself by saying he is neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor one of the prophets. He is a "voice crying in the wilderness." And he is witnessing to the reader about Jesus as the Lamb of God who is taking away the sin of the world.

This Jesus is the one who, in the words of the prologue, existed from the beginning of Creation, the one on whom the Spirit descended and rests, and he is the Son of God. In pointing him out as "God's lamb," he indicates "how things are going to end" for Jesus and why he will die a sacrificial death for the sins of the world. In John's Gospel account the death of Jesus occurs "on the afternoon when the Passover lambs were killed in the Temple. Thus, Jesus is the true Passover lamb. John wants us to understand the events surrounding the life of Jesus "as a new, and better, Exodus story." In a similar way to how he brought the children of Israel out of Egypt, so now God is "bringing a new people out of an even older and darker slavery" --- that of sin itself.

But by contrast with the original Exodus story which was limited to a narrative about the people of Israel, *in taking away the sin of the world*, "God's rescue operation (for his fallen people) is moving out, wider than just Israel, to embrace the whole of creation."

In John's gospel, it is the religious leaders and rulers and privileged ones who miss the meaning of what Jesus has to say. The "people on the edges, outside the boundaries, get the point and find themselves forgiven, healed, brought in by God's transforming love." John the Baptist claims to know that Jesus is the anointed one, because at his baptism the spirit of God descended like a dove and claimed him as *his beloved Son*. And when John uses this

term in his gospel account, those who eagerly came to John the Baptist for baptism would have understood the term to refer to the Messiah, the true king “who would free Israel from pagan domination.”

In this reading, what John is doing is introducing Jesus to some of his own disciples with the “revelation formula”: It is a kind of code because John uses the expression when recounting people’s interactions with Jesus. Thus, Nathaniel introduces Jesus in the way he views him: “Rabbi, you are the Son of God!” It follows examples from the Old Testament such as when Samuel saw Saul and said to him “Look, Here is the man who shall rule over my people.”

And being introduced to Jesus actually helps these disciples figure out their own true identity. When Jesus turns around and asks, “what are you looking for?” it’s his way of asking to identify themselves.

But, since they don’t yet know precisely who they are, they move on to ask the seemingly mundane question, “where are you staying?” Following which, he proceeds to spend the whole day with them. And this introduction to Jesus conveys three key aspects of Jesus’ identity: “he is the apocalyptic lamb who destroys evil. He is the Suffering Servant willing to give his life for the redemption of his people, and the pascal lamb who takes away our sins and leads us from bondage to liberation.”

The Lamb would have been a recognizable metaphor in the first century. In Jewish writings in the end times there will be “a conquering lamb who will destroy evil in the world.”

We think that John, in using the comparison with a lamb, was thinking about the scapegoat in the Old Testament. On the Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur*), once a year, the high priest would select a goat whom he would dedicate to the task of carrying the sins of the world out into the wilderness.

In the second half of this text, John witnesses to his own disciples who in turn follow Jesus. Andrew witnesses to his brother Peter. In a story that follows, Jesus finds Philip without a witness, but Philip then finds Nathaniel and witnesses to him. The witness tends to be necessary in order to help others see who Jesus is. The invitation, “come and see,” is issued twice. For John, faith begins by responding to that invitation: come and see.

There are two words in Greek for “seeing.” One suggests *physical* sight, but the one John uses here is not physical but rather *spiritual insight*. There are three times in John’s account when Andrew is found bringing someone to Jesus. Whereas in Matthew, the first disciples give up their *work* to follow the Lord, in John what they are giving up is *a former religious commitment* (that to John the Baptist).

When Jesus asks the question “what are you seeking?” it refers to a spiritual search, not a literal one. Likewise, when the response is “where are you staying?” the answer is not as out-of-place as it may sound.

What they are really asking is about a relationship with Jesus. To stay or remain or abide is a favorite verb in John’s gospel. Thus, Jesus’ response to this question is also to be read on a figurative level, not a physical one. They are saying, “how can we abide in you?” “What will it take?” Where can we go to establish a relationship with you? To which Jesus says simply, “come and see.” Coming to Jesus means believing in him. Following him out of love and a search for spiritual truth. Such simple sentences. Yet so filled with meaning. Which is why we keep returning to these passages, because they don’t get old. They are as relevant today as they were in the first century.

What are you looking for?

Where can we find truth and security?

Come and see.

AMEN

Amen.

Sources

N.T. Wright, Matthew for Everyone, SPCK, London, Part 1, 2002

Brian Stoffregen, “John 1: 29-42, 2nd Sunday after Epiphany – Year A,” *Exegetical Notes*, www.crossmarks.com/brian/john1X29.htm

Edward F. Markquart, “Two Witnesses: John the Baptist and Andrew,” www.sermonsfromseattle.com

Alyce McKenzie, “John the Baptist Introduces His Disciples to Jesus,” 2011, www.patheos.com