

SERMON – 2ND EPIPHANY
JOHN 1:29-42
JANUARY 19, 2020

“WHAT’S THAT YOU SAY?”

As Jesus of Nazareth approached the Jordan River going from his hometown to a place called Bethany, on the East side of the river, few recognized him, fewer still were expecting anything from him. Precisely as Isaiah 53 had predicted, Jesus *“had no form or majesty that we should look at him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him”*. As though wanting to remedy the situation Isaiah describes, John the Baptist ladled Jesus with superlatives galore...*“look, the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” ...“I saw the Spirit come down from heaven and remain on him” ...“I have seen and testify that this is God’s chosen one.”*

But that’s just John’s testimony – the witness of a man. In the other gospel accounts of the baptism of Jesus, there was “the voice.” Heaven itself said *“this is my Son, with whom I am well pleased.”* Jesus’ baptism in John’s gospel includes no voice from heaven – just voices of people who’ve met him. John’s testimony says there should be little doubt Jesus is Immanuel - God with us. John spoke forcefully, but a testimony is still a fragile, risky venture. Testimonies offer no “proofs” beyond what the testifier has seen or heard. Every testimony - and that includes a Christian one, goes before a jury of sorts, another human heart that will accept, or not accept what they’ve heard. Now days, testimonies are saddled with the label “opinion” I afraid.

In our story today two men are introduced to Jesus and they in turn introduce him to others. From the genesis of his ministry at Bethany beside the Jordan till his crucifixion in Jerusalem Jesus spoke like the prophets God had sent before him. Like Isaiah who said *“come, let us reason together, though your sins be as scarlet they shall be white as snow”*, like Amos who said; *“let justice roll down like the mighty waters, and righteousness like an ever flowing stream”*, like Micah who said; *“what does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God”*?

From the innocuous beginning described in this lesson the kingdom of God has gone from human heart to human heart, received in them, or not, largely on the basis of the question Jesus asked ...*“what do you want”* – sometimes translated *“who are you looking for”* or *“what are you seeking?”* The prophets who went before should have given a clue as to what one should expect of Jesus, so one might have expected something a bit more profound from those men who were introduced to him as *“rabbi, where are you staying.”*

One might have expected, if these men really did understand Jesus to be who John the Baptist told them he was, to ask for the meaning of life, or why the world contains so much suffering or inequality, or what is the key to happiness or a moral, upstanding life – heck even ‘how do you get

rid of Romans’?. Yet in truth, it’s the perfect question – the question you ought to ask of Jesus too – may I spend some time with you? Behind the inquiry of these men lies the essence of Christianity – people wanting – indeed needing to spend time with Jesus.

Yes, Christianity confronts hard questions and hard realities. Yes, the abstract inquiries of our minds are important. But if you want to be a Christian you must be someone who spends time with Jesus so that you can know and follow him. “Come and see” in the gospel of John is the equivalent of Jesus’ invitation in the other gospels to “follow me.” I want to point out word order in Jesus’ response because it’s important. When we think of discipleship we default to the idea that first I must believe and know who Jesus is before I can (or will) follow. We make it into a “*see and come*” question. Our lesson begs to differ - first we come – “just as I am without one plea” as the hymn says. In our Lutheran tradition we come through baptism – which is the context for our lesson today by the way. We come to Christ that way as Jesus came to the Father and the world through his baptism by John.

Humbled in those waters of repentance, and thus as Matthew says “fulfilling all righteousness” Jesus began to show life by life what having someone who takes your sins away is like. He began to show life by life what being filled with the Holy Spirit enables. He began to show life by life what it means to have been chosen by God’s chosen one. Disciples do what Jesus says – they remain with him, discovering that “come and see” isn’t just an invitation but a promise that the day that matters most to God is the one you’re in right now, that portion of your life just unfolding, those sins that today you must and may hand over to him in confession and never be burdened with again, those opportunities for witness that are about to present themselves and if taken, will create of you a testimony that is believable.

The life that Jesus gave for our sins and conducted for our example is the life we convey when we follow him. What are you seeking in life is a profound question – lots of people ask it. If they’re not seeking Jesus, they’re not going to be satisfied – you know that. At this time when the church is tempted, for reasons primarily having to do with our declining numbers and apparent lack of cultural appeal to offer just another appealing commodity called ‘community’ or happiness, our lesson from John says “*wait...that’s not it.*”

When we invite people to come, what they had better see is what they truly need to see - Jesus, What makes us a community of disciples is NOT that we are great at everything we do, but that we are devoted to one another in Christ, because that is precisely who we are – people “in Christ” – who have been invited and accepted the invitation to come and stay with the Savior of humankind – Jesus.” We are the hearts that host him, the minds conforming to his, and together we are determined to be a congregation that shows the Spirit of God that rested on Jesus rests on us and makes us restless till someone else knows him too. AMEN