

“Behold the Lamb”

Sunday, January 15, 2017

2nd Sunday after the Epiphany

John 1:29-42, CEB

The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is the one about whom I said, *‘He who comes after me is really greater than me because he existed before me.’* Even I didn’t recognize him, but I came baptizing with water so that he might be made known to Israel.”

John testified, “I saw the Spirit coming down from heaven like a dove, and it rested on him. Even I didn’t recognize him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, *‘The one on whom you see the Spirit coming down and resting is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’* I have seen and testified that this one is God’s Son.”

The next day John was standing again with two of his disciples. When he saw Jesus walking along he said, “Look! The Lamb of God!”

The two disciples heard what he said, and they followed Jesus.

When Jesus turned and saw them following, he asked, “What are you looking for?”

They said, “Rabbi (which is translated Teacher), where are you staying?”

He replied, “Come and see.” So they went 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 disciples who heard what John said and followed Jesus was Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter. He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, “We have found the Messiah” (which is translated Christ). He led him to Jesus.

Jesus looked at him and said, “You are Simon, son of John. You will be called Cephas” (which is translated Peter).

This is the Word of God for the people of God.

Thanks, be to God.

[2ND Service: *Affirmation of Faith*]

[MESSAGE]

Last week we talked about the baptism of Jesus.

We heard from an Old Testament prophet and tried to make a connection between the God of creation and Emmanuel – God with us.

We saw how Jesus came into the center of our lives and asks to remain there.

Today we hear how John's Gospel presents the story of Jesus' baptism.

He chooses to tell the story in the past tense, from John the Baptist's point of view.

What we notice is how important John's witness is.

What we learn is how important our witness can be.

Let us pray...Lord, we come to your gospel this morning wondering what you will say to us. Open our ears and our hearts to hear and accept your message. In Jesus' name, we pray. **Amen.**

There is a lot to talk about in this reading.

It offers a different perspective for a sermon about Baptism.

It shows us how John announces the identity of Jesus.

Or we could talk about evangelism.

I could build a sermon on any one of those themes.

The theme I want to focus on this morning, however, is “witness”.

This version of the Baptism of Jesus story describes how John the Baptist witnessed an event in Jesus’ life and then used it as a story to point other people toward God.

Isn’t that what it means to be a “witness”? – Tell your story so that it points people toward the truth.

During Advent, we looked at the four different gospel versions of the Nativity story and how each writer wanted to focus on something significant for them.

The story of Jesus’ Baptism is handled the same way by the gospel writers.

Each one wants to point out something specific that is important to them.

In fact, that is generally true of most gospel stories. So, here we are, the day after Jesus came to be baptized in the Jordan River.

John is again preaching to a crowd of his followers about the coming Messiah and their need to repent.

He sees Jesus walking along the road and points him out to the crowd.

“Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is the one about whom I said, *‘He who comes after me is really greater than me because he existed before me.’* Even I didn’t recognize him, but I came baptizing with water so that he might be made known to Israel.”

We should notice that, not only does John point to Jesus, but he also tells his own story.

“This is the guy I told you about. I didn’t even realize who he is, and we’re cousins!”

John makes this a personal story.

I've watched enough courtroom drama on television to know that the witnesses with the most compelling personal stories are the ones most likely to convince a jury.

Isn't that true in all aspects of our life?

A story that is truly personal and heartfelt is more likely to capture your attention and hold your interest.

Aren't you more likely to believe a story that seems like it actually happened to the person telling it?

This is the principle behind all those ads on TV asking us to support endangered species and abandoned puppies.

It's why we give to Shriner's Hospital, St. Jude's, and UNICEF.

We hear personal stories that motivate us to help, so that these groups can continue their good work.

Faithful, honest, and personal witness stories are vital to how we relate to one another.

We use the stories of our lives to motivate others, to show people who we are, and to help others understand us.

We also use our stories to point others to the truth that our stories reveal.

When you tell somebody about the great vacation you had, you might also motivate them to visit the same places you visited.

When you tell somebody about your good experience with a doctor, a hospital, or some other medical treatment, you might be helping them decide who to seek out for their own healthcare.

When you describe a wonderful worship experience, or an exciting mission project, or the food and fellowship at our 4th Monday meals, you just might be suggesting that they come to our church to work on their relationship with Jesus.

When you talk about how much God loves you, it might be a hint for someone to come find out more.

It's interesting that, in this short section of scripture, John tells his story three times.

He is persistent in telling the same story to anyone who will listen.

The result is that his witness starts a chain reaction as others share his story, become disciples, and others follow Jesus.

Because John's story is compelling, others respond and begin to form their own stories.

This chain of witness continues to point people toward the truth that is Jesus.

Now, you might think that this sounds a lot like "*evangelism*" and "*discipleship*".

You'd be right, and that's the point.

Often, we think that evangelism is for the "professionals" and it's just too scary for me.

Discipleship is about acting the way Christians are supposed to act, and being good, and going to church.

But, all of *that* **IS** our *witness*.

Effective evangelism and faithful discipleship are accomplished when our witness is personal and heartfelt.

Being a witness is just being a storyteller.

Sharing your personal stories with people because you want them to have what you have.

What brought **you** into relationship with Jesus?

This is a story only you can tell; it is personal and unique for each one of us.

This is a story so compelling that it has kept you coming to church, giving of your gifts, and reading the Bible for many years.

What is so great about *your* story that it has the power to hold **your** attention for this long?

If it's good enough to keep you around, how might it inspire someone else to meet Jesus?

When was the last time you felt God get in the middle of your life and help you get through something?

You really needed God right then and your prayers were answered; you got what you needed.

My guess is that you were convicted at that moment about how important God is to you and that God really cares about you.

Isn't that a personal story worth sharing with somebody so that they might be inspired to seek God when they're in need?

I think we sometimes take it for granted that everyone knows God the same way we do.

That's not a fair assumption.

John the Baptist proclaimed loud and often –

“Look! Here is the Lamb of God!”

People heard and some of them paid attention.

John the Baptist did not take credit or responsibility for the people who heard his story.

Some listened and followed Jesus; many others did not.

The same is true when we tell our story.

We are not responsible for other people's decisions after they hear what we say.

We must continue to tell our story.

“Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.”

That is the truth we point to when we tell the stories of how Jesus has changed our lives.

We tell those stories when we share what Jesus means to us.

We also tell those stories when we show others how our behavior and attitudes have changed because of what Jesus has done.

We tell a very different story when we show the world behavior that does not fit with the narrative of Jesus Christ.

That’s why it is so important that we live true to the story we tell.

What story are you telling today?

“Behold, the Lamb of God; this is the Son of God.”

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**