

Year A Epiphany 2 Come and See John 1 vv29 to 42

Today, John introduces us to Jesus. He has actually laid it all out for us earlier in the first few paragraphs of his Gospel – the Word made flesh is God, John writes for us. The Word is the life and the light of all humanity although many do not believe he is, he says. Today, John points to Jesus of Nazareth and tells us, “This is the one I was talking about.” Through the words of John, John’s disciples, and Jesus himself, we learn some very important things about Jesus and, crucial to us now, we learn what these things mean to our lives today.

John sees Jesus approaching and points to him, declaring to the crowd, “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. That’s a familiar phrase to us. We may even think we have a pretty good grasp of what it means. We associate it with Jesus’ death on the cross – Jesus is the Lamb of God who died to take away the sins of the world. The people listening to John, though, are hearing this phrase for the very first time. John, the Gospel writer, is the only Gospel writer to use this phrase, “Lamb of God”. It would be helpful to us then, to explore what John means by this phrase that we now hear so often.

First, the words John wrote in Greek are literally translated as, “See the Lamb of God lifting up the sin of the cosmos!” See the Lamb of God lifting up the sin of the cosmos. John very strongly connects Jesus to the Passover lamb and so this is one helpful way to understand the richness of the phrase “Lamb of God”. The Passover lamb is eaten by a family, not sacrificed in the temple. This particular meal of lamb first came into being when the Israelites were instructed to eat a lamb together on the night before God brought them out of oppression in Egypt. The lamb was eaten and its blood spread on the door posts of their home so that all inside the home

would be protected from the angel of death passing by their homes through the night. In John's Gospel, Jesus is killed on the Passover. He is the lamb whose blood will protect his people, putting them in the position of being available for God's rescue from the greed and competition, the oppression and inequality of empire – not Egypt any longer, but “empire” nonetheless.

This Lamb of God, protecting and preparing for rescue, is lifting up the sins of the cosmos. “Cosmos” comes from the Greek word that means “decoration” or “embellishment”. So cosmos is referring not to God's good creation but to humanity's piling on of their brokenness onto this creation – the wrongful desires, the lust for more, the material things consuming our thoughts and dictating our measurement of success. The Lamb of God is lifting up all of the sin that comes as a result. When our hearts and minds, our desires and our longings lie with the things of the world rather than with God, this is what John refers to as “sin” throughout his Gospel. This turning away from God, John shows us is a willful unbelief – the failure to trust God, the choice to not enter into communion with God despite God's invitations. The Lamb of God is lifting up this unbelief, this refusal to be in relationship with God. Notice the ongoing nature of the Greek – lifting up...an ongoing activity. In his life as well as in death, Jesus holds before the people their lack of relationship with God. But he doesn't leave it at that. He lifts up our sin, our brokenness, our turning away from God so that we can do something about it. He lifts up the lack of relationship while also providing the way into relationship. When John uses the words, “lifting up” he knows he will call into the minds of the people, the story of Moses lifting up the image of the snake in the wilderness so that all those Israelites who had turned from God and were dying because of this, could look at the snake, lifted up so that they could easily see it, they would look on the

snake and be healed. Shortly after today's Gospel story, Jesus makes that connection outright when he says to Nicodemus: "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him" (3:14). Jesus shows us where we fall short but also shows us the way to healing - the choosing of relationship with God.

"See the Lamb of God lifting up the sin of the cosmos!" This short phrase of John's concurs up, for the people, the story of their salvation – their deliverance from the brokenness of empire into the perfection of life with God in God's promised land. Now John tells us how he came to the realization that Jesus is the Lamb of God – the one who will restore Israel into the perfection of life with God in God's promised land.

Twice during the speech of John the Baptist he says to us, "I did not know him." These two men were cousins, very close in age. We know their mothers visit each other to share news. They certainly knew each other. But John is talking about a different kind of knowledge. It is common to know someone without really knowing who they are on the inside: like falling in love with someone at first sight and then spending the rest of your days together getting to know one another. John truly got to know Jesus, realized who he was on the inside, when God told him, "He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit." John then saw this come to be when he baptized Jesus, his cousin from Nazareth. The Spirit descended and stayed on his cousin – the one who was able to bathe people in the Holy Spirit. As difficult as this may have been for John to believe, he did believe: he knew what this meant and he spelled it out for the people. Not only was Jesus the one sent by God, called Son of God, he was God. Here was the God of the Exodus Passover, come in the flesh to be the protector of the people, to lift up

the brokenness of their relationship with God, and provide the opportunity to choose to be in relationship with God once more. To make sure we have all of this front and centre in our minds, before we move on to meet John's disciples and Jesus, John repeats his crucial phrase once more: See the Lamb of God lifting up the sin of the cosmos!

In response to John's witness, we now witness something amazing: we see the blossoming of John's belief into the belief of two of his disciples. They hear the earth-shattering claim John has just made and they are excited. They want to be part of it and so they follow the man John has just pointed to – Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus, aware that he is being followed, turns to the two men and, here we have the first – and therefore very important – words spoken by Jesus in this Gospel. "What are you seeking?" he asks. It is a question he is asking of us, of everyone who hears or reads this story. "What are you seeking?" "What is it you want to gain by all your striving and working and thinking? What is the goal of all your living? What do you wish to achieve or gain or be?" (p.118 of *New Proclamation Series A*).

It may not seem that John's disciples answer him because they ask a question of their own in response. But their question does reveal the answer – their question tells us what they are seeking, what we are seeking. "Teacher," they say, "Where are you staying?" Teacher. They know who he is and they want to learn from him. More than this they want to be with him. "Where are you staying?" uses the Greek word "*meno*" and "*meno*" is a loaded word in the Gospel of John. *Meno* means "remain" or "abide". It is the same word we heard earlier when God told John that the Holy Spirit would "abide" on Jesus. I will abide in them and they will abide in me, Jesus later says of his disciples. "Abide" has the sense of permanence, of being one with Christ. This oneness with Christ is the whole purpose of his appearing according

to John's Gospel. The way we are to be healed of our brokenness is to "abide" in Jesus and allow him to abide in us. The two disciples are not simply asking where Jesus is hanging out for the time being, "they want to know about the enduring, permanent, eternal, undying dwelling place of this Lamb of God. Where are you staying? Where can we find you? Where shall we go to be with you, to receive what you have to offer? Where can we be in the very presence of God?" (Audrey West, workingpreacher.org).

Jesus' answer to our seeking is so very hope-giving because it is so very simple: "Come and see," he says. There are so many references to "seeing" in this short Gospel story – John sees Jesus coming, he sees the Spirit descend on him, he tells us to see the Lamb of God, Jesus sees the disciples following him, and he asks what they are seeking before we finally hear him say, "Come and see." "[Jesus'] answer captures a primary message of John's Gospel: If you want to know the word made flesh, come and see Jesus. If you want to know what love is like, come and see Jesus. If you want to experience God's glory, to be filled with bread that never perishes, to quench your thirst with living water, to be born again, to abide in love, to behold the light of the world, to experience the way, the truth, and the life, to enter into life everlasting, . . . if you want to know God, come and see Jesus" (Audrey West, workingpreacher.org).

"Come and see." And they remained – they abided – with him for the rest of the day. If you want to get to know someone, truly know someone, then spending time with that person is an absolute necessity. To get to know God in Jesus Christ, we, too, must spend time with him – we must abide with him. We do this every time we gather together, listen to God's word, reflect on God's word, and share a meal at

God's table. This is an important time for us. As we get to know God better and better, it changes who we are and how we are in the world.

Abiding with Jesus was not the end of the story for our two disciples today and it is not the end of our story. One of the disciples, Andrew, seeks out his brother, Simon Peter, and tells him, "We have found the Messiah." They have found the one who is to restore relationship with God...and others are then invited to share in this discovery. "Come and see" are words that set up an often repeated pattern in John's Gospel – Andrew encounters Jesus and invites his brother to come and see, to encounter Jesus for himself. Philip then encounters Jesus and invites Nathaniel to "come and see." The Samaritan woman at the well encounters Jesus and then invites her entire village to "come and see." The joy and the excitement of encountering the one who will mend the brokenness, repair the relationship with God, is shared. In sharing, more brokenness is mended, more relationships repaired. For God's purpose is not to have individual relationships with each individual person. God's purpose is to reconcile all of creation to God and to each other. And so, we gather to be sent.

Abiding in Christ, being fully one with Christ is not possible where there is still something other than love and peace in our hearts and minds. As we hear later in the first letter of John, "Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates a brother or sister is still in the darkness" (1 John 2:9). As Jesus says, we are meant to be one just as he and the Father are one. We are shown how to do this today: we spend time in the presence of God. We witness. We invite. "Come and see" – not only with our lips but in our lives.

In the words of Mother Teresa: "God loves me. I'm not here just to fill a place, just to be a number. [God] has chosen me for a purpose. I know it" (p.1 of *Mother Teresa Her Essential Wisdom*). What is our purpose? Come and see.