

Emmanuel, Virginia Beach
January 19, 2020
2nd Sunday after Epiphany (A)
A Sermon by the Rt. Rev. James B. Magness

John 1:29-42

“John saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, ‘Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!’”¹

Growing up in a small Western North Carolina mountain town has forever changed my perception of the world. Out of that early life experience I gained a fascination about how we got our news. Like a lot of small towns we had a local newspaper. Our newspaper, the Times News, focused almost exclusively upon the local happenings of the community. If you didn't read about an event in the Times News then probably it didn't actually happen. Let me tell you what you could have read about yesterday – that actually happened. The blue grass band Appalachian Fire is scheduled to play in a local Main Street hangout. Ben Bryson, local high school basketball star, scored 29 points in a game against their schools adjacent-county rival. That pesky round-about that was just installed on a road leading out of town was evaluated through a series of on-the-street random interviews. Finally, the high school gym that had been built during the post 1920s depression reconstruction era was being torn down to build a new gym. If you want some artifacts from the old gym as a memento, a phone number was given to make your request. These were the items that were on the front page of section one, most of them above the fold!

The story told in the Gospel of John that Deacon Carter Sinclair just read sounds a great deal like a local news story. It was as if a reporter was writing the stories based upon an in-person interview with a man who was known locally as John the Baptist. John was a what we might call a rough looking and sounding man. His speech and dress were not going to help him win any 1st century popularity contests. For days John had stationed himself at the Jordan River where he was doing what he called a baptism of repentance. Let's say that our fictional reporter had just asked John if anything out of the ordinary had occurred down at the river. In reply John told the news person that earlier in the day at the River Jordan. John's reply was that he saw someone walking toward him whom he knew at once was Jesus. When the reporter asked what happened John told him this: “I was in the Jordan River helping people to be relieved of their sins when all of a sudden I looked up and there was my cousin Jesus.” The reporter then asked John if he was sure it was Jesus. John said that of course he knew Jesus. He knew this because the day before he had given Jesus baptism in the river water. John went on to comment that his cousin Jesus was no ordinary baptismal candidate. “Jesus,” John said, “is ready to take our sins. Not only will Jesus take away our individual sins, but Jesus is “...the Lamb of God takes away the sin of the (whole) world!”

¹ John 1:29, NSRV.

For a moment I want to exit our fictional interview and say something about this “lamb” about whom John spoke. At times we fall into the trap of thinking about lambs as the docile, sweet and passive creatures whom we find grazing upon the fertile fields. The image of a “lamb” can make us think about anything but power. Yet this lamb will be the one who reigns in God’s heaven and will bring about judgment on the wicked and secure salvation for the righteous. This is the lamb that the writer of the last book of the Bible, The Revelation to John, wrote when he described the end of time and those who would dwell with God into eternity. This is the lamb of God who has come in the power of the Lord. This is the lamb of God who will not be deterred by any power on this earth. John is telling all who will hear him that we can expect Jesus to literally turn the world upside down.²

Finally, the reporter asked John if there was anything else he could say about this person Jesus. John said, “Well it was only that I had not seen my cousin for some time and was glad to see him. We were talking when Jesus abruptly told me that he had to go and went walking on down the road toward Jerusalem. All of a sudden two of the people who had been helping me took off after Jesus. You just can’t get good help any more.”

The reporter then left John and went to speak with some other bystanders. Through conversations with them the reporter was able to piece together the rest of the story. When John’s left him and caught up with Jesus, immediately they asked Jesus where he was staying. The reporter knew that this was good news, because that’s the type of small-town news that the local folk really like to know. Jesus’ answer to the two would-be fellow lodgers was “come and see.”

Jesus’ answer was indirect, and very small-town: “C’mon,” he says. “Come and see.” Come they do. They followed Jesus back to the house where he’s lodging. And this takes us to the second part of our story.

That afternoon the little group, Jesus and prospective students, sat and talked for hours, all about the Scriptures and the love of God. After a meal, Andrew — one of that little group — goes off and finds his brother, Simon. “Simon,” he says, “we’ve found the Messiah!” Then Andrew dragged Simon back with him. When he brought Simon back, Jesus immediately connected with the new student. Jesus even gave him a new name, Peter.

Has anyone ever asked you to come and see Jesus? If so, they were taking on the ministry and message of Jesus and walking in the footsteps of Andrew when he brought his brother to his new teacher. Jesus asks all who hear him to come and see; come and see what he and his love can do in our lives. Today in the renewal of our baptismal vows we are affirming that we, as seekers of the living Lord Jesus, are being changed

² Revelation 14:1, NRSV.

by the love of God in Jesus Christ. We are called to come and see about Jesus; come and see what God can do with our lives.

In and through Jesus' simple command to his potential followers: "Come and see," the first generation of his followers is made. This is the beginning of bringing a host of people to come and meet meet the Messiah.

Why would you want to bring someone to meet Jesus? Isn't there another easier and more efficient way to be a follower of Jesus than for us to actually get personally involved with Jesus; to get personally involved in the lives of Jesus' people? Isn't there an easier way to be forgiven?

Rowan Williams, former Archbishop of Canterbury, wrote that the forgiveness we know through the resurrection event, the stuff of our creeds and prayers, is something that "cannot be understood apart from Jesus." This is the same Jesus into whom we were baptized. This was our Christian beginning, and which was and is the event in our lives that reminds us of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection.³

When did someone bring you to Jesus? The moment of meeting Jesus is the key event in the lives of those who follow our Lord. Someone most likely brought you and brought me to Jesus. Most likely we didn't come on our own. When that person or those persons brought us to Jesus, they were taking on the message and ministry of Christ and seeing to it that we can have the opportunity to know the empowering and saving Christ Jesus.

Once we, like Andrew and Simon Peter have met him, it becomes our turn. It is our turn to be ambassadors of the love God we read about in the Bible; that God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son that we might have eternal life.⁴ Once we've received the love of God, it is time for us to give God's love away. In a few moments, several members of this Emmanuel congregation will stand around the baptismal font with me to confirm and reaffirm their faith in the risen Lord Jesus, and to be received into our community of the Christian faith. When we do that and reaffirm our baptismal vows, all of us will proclaim that now, today, we are ambassadors of the love of God.

A few centuries ago a Spanish mystic by the name of Teresa of Avila, toward the end of her life wrote a letter to her nuns. It went like this:

"Christ has no body on earth now but yours,
no hands but yours,
no feet but yours;
yours are the eyes through which he looks with compassion on the world;
yours are the feet with which he walks to do good;

³ Rowan Williams, Resurrection: Interpreting the Easter Gospel (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2002), 55.

⁴ John 3:16, NRSV.

yours are the hands with which he blesses all the world.”⁵

That sisters and brothers is the simple and yet profound commitment we will be making to follow Jesus as our Lord and to proclaim God’s boundless love. The time has come for us to make and reaffirm our commitment to Christ. Fellow Christians, are you ready to do this?

⁵[http://jesuitinstitute.org/Pages/JPP/8%20Intentional%20Prophetic/Prophetic%202%20\(Christ%20has%20no%20hands%20but%20yours\).pdf](http://jesuitinstitute.org/Pages/JPP/8%20Intentional%20Prophetic/Prophetic%202%20(Christ%20has%20no%20hands%20but%20yours).pdf) Accessed 01/18/20.