



2ND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME: A-2008 JANUARY 20, 2008

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ISAIAH 49:3, 5-6 1 CORINTHIANS 1:1-3 JOHN 1:29-34

We often have preconceived notions of how someone that we've not met, but have heard about should look, and act. I know that I sometimes form pictures of what a person looks like from simply speaking with them on the telephone. Later if I happen to meet them I can be disappointed or even shocked when a man with a booming voice turns out to be someone five, three and one hundred and twenty pounds or a rather high pitched voice belongs to a lumbering two hundred seventy five pound giant. The truth is that ordinarily we cannot make any definitive assumptions about a person from any of their exterior characteristics. Only when we come to know them does that experience give us a real picture of who the person truly is.

In our First Reading this morning from the prophet Isaiah we have what is called a "Servant of the Lord" oracle. This mysterious servant is one chosen by God and formed in his mother's womb. He is to reunite God's people, but more than just raising up the people of Israel, God is to make him a "light" for all nations so that God's salvation will reach all people and not just the Jews. The identity of this servant is not revealed, yet his mission is an extraordinarily difficult one. Christians have of course recognized this mysterious servant as Jesus, the Christ and in the Gospel of John and many of the Epistles of Paul we find this image of Christ as Servant central.

In light of the expectations of Jesus' own contemporaries, however, it seems true to say that He was not what they expected or hoped for in a Messiah. For them the mysterious servant of Isaiah was to answer their prayers that they might be released from the tyranny of Rome, and perhaps in light of Isaiah the Messiah would reign over not just Israel but the entire world. It would then have been difficult for many to find in Jesus the Messiah for whom they hoped. He was no zealot for an independent Jewish kingdom. He advocated not violence but love of one's enemies. The expectations they had and the reality that Jesus presented were not only different but even contradictory.

Last week we celebrated the Baptism of the Lord. This week our Gospel reading from John takes us back for a second look. This time, however, we see the Baptism from both John the Evangelist's and John the Baptist's point of view. After pointing out that Jesus is the "Lamb of God," the Baptist makes it clear that he did not initially recognize Jesus as the "Son of God,"

and that it was the Spirit that came down upon Jesus and remained upon Him that convinced John that Jesus was the one for whom he was sent to prepare the way. *Did he not recognize his cousin Jesus, or did he simply not know that his cousin was the One who was to come? Or was he ignorant of both?* Whatever the case, Jesus' baptism and the Spirit's presence became the moment for which John awaited along with the rest of Israel, and he testifies to the importance of Jesus as the one who ranks ahead of him, because He existed before John. In this relatively brief discourse John moves from ignorance of who Jesus is to identifying Him in two distinct titles: "Lamb of God" and "Son of God."

Jesus is the "*Lamb of God.*" Rich in Old Testament meaning, this Lamb of God was the One sacrificed on the Passover in Jerusalem in the same place, it was believed, that Isaac would have been sacrificed by Abraham. He is also Isaiah's "Lamb led to the slaughter" and the Just Man who shall bear the guilt of many. For us, because of the use of the "Lamb of God," in John's *Book of Revelation* the Lamb of God not only suggests the paschal lamb that saved the firstborn males of the Jews at the time of the Passover but also as the Servant of the Lord as the one "who takes away the sin of the world" giving the lamb Eucharistic meaning as well.

He is the "*Son of God.*" This title was first used in the ritual of enthronement when one of the kings of Israel who was to govern God's people was literally adopted as God's son. For we as Christians "Son of God" means the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, equal with the Father and the Spirit, and it is a title that Matthew uses to indicate Christ's divine union with the Father.

While John may have been confused when first meeting with Jesus it didn't take him long to comprehend who Jesus was, and he was not slow to let others know Jesus' identity sending his own disciples to follow Jesus. It is significant that when the Baptist is portrayed in art either as a child or as an adult he is most often pictured pointing, pointing out into the distance and showing the way to Jesus.

We know from Scripture that the Baptist pointed the way to Christ for John and Andrew. They in turn brought Peter and Philip to the Lord and probably others. It also took the Apostles some time to fathom Jesus' role as Messiah. They seemed so locked into their preconceived notions of who they wanted the Christ to be, and as a result, about their importance in His Kingdom. It took His Death and Resurrection for them to actually understand what He had tried to tell them for three years, His Kingdom was not of this world and their importance was to be found in their commitment to service.

I suspect that even today many of us have our own somewhat distorted images of who Christ is and what He should be doing in our lives. Often enough our views of Christ are not far from the views of the Apostles before His Resurrection. We want the powerful God-Man to work His magic in our lives. We want not only all our needs but all of our desires to be met from His hands, and we often make that an underlying prerequisite for our belief. We far too often even as adults play games with God: if You do this, I will do that; if You grant me this, I will never ask another thing of You. It may sound silly and childish when I say it to you, but admit it; you've played the game.

This is not to say that you or I do not have a true understanding of Christ, but just as we can sometimes act maturely and at other times act childishly in our everyday lives and relationships with others, so too, we can have more than one understanding of Christ and sometimes we retreat to that childish understanding. The point today as we meet Christ through the eyes of John the Baptist is that we try to understand him as he helps to define us. The Baptist only made sense in terms of Jesus. He was the one who prepared the way, and the one who having done his job would decrease. Obviously as Christians, we also only make sense in terms of Christ. Who He is; what He did should determine how we live our lives if being a Christian means anything to us. We speak about Christ as our King, but His idea of Kingship was service. We speak about Him as our God, and yet He is a strange sort of God who gives Himself for His creatures. We think about Him as being all powerful and yet He identifies with the powerless. He is not concerned about whether we fear Him with His strength and power and authority. His only concern is the one that He voiced to Peter that morning on the shore of the lake, "Do you love Me?"

"Do you love Me?" Not what we might expect from a God, but then our God is not some ordinary god. He asks the question because He knows that our answer will determine the way that we live our lives. So do you? Do you love Him? If so, how do you show it?