



**2nd Sunday after Epiphany
January 16, 2011
“Come and See . . .the Lamb of God”**

*Prayer: Open our eyes, Lord, we wish to see Jesus. Open our ears, Lord,
we wish to hear your invitation to follow you. Amen.*

At a conference meeting earlier this week, one of my colleagues shared how a member of his church had spent time browsing the internet. In this member's search, the member explored websites from the top one hundred congregations in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America that worshipped two-thousand or more over a weekend. The internet search revealed that of those top one hundred congregations, two – only two are still actively growing. The remaining ninety-eight are in a period of decline.

Hearing that statistic is a bit sobering. While churches across denominations are in decline for a number of reasons, the fact that only two of the largest congregations in the ELCA are still growing is sad.

That statistic also got me thinking –about our evangelism, and our witness into the world. Our mission statement reads “to be an instrument of Christ Jesus in Word and deed to the community and to the world”. This is a good mission statement to have. But I am also left wondering in light of the mission statement AND our Gospel for today, how do we understand who Jesus is for us? And in this understanding, how do we share this understanding of who Jesus is with others?

Our understanding of who Jesus is impacts our witness greatly. For example, if we live our lives believing God is a God of love, our lives will reflect that love towards others. But if we believe that God is a God of anger and hatred, then our lives will reflect that towards others as well.

Now, in saying that, I will not deny there are places in the Bible where God is angry with God's people for the sins they have committed, for walking away from the path God has intended, for failing to keep the promises that they had made. Nor will I deny there are times today where we walk away from God's path, where we think the Ten Commandments do not apply to us. This week in the news has been no exception: burglaries for money to buy drugs; violence in order to get one's way, peaceful protests turning disruptive; disagreement and death replacing civility, common sense, and the greatest command of all, to “Love your neighbor as yourself”.

The events of this week sadden me. They sadden me because of the witness we as a Christian society have given to the rest of the world in these situations – a witness that in more ways than one has followed the thought of act first, ask questions later. Yet, in the midst of the news from this past week, I am reminded also of the reality that in the grander scheme of things, the God in the Bible and the God of today is indeed a loving God – a loving God who repeatedly shows God’s love and concern for all of creation, for all of the world, who is gracious to each and every one of us. In God’s grace and love, God decided to save the world through the death of His Son.

John gives many names for Jesus in the First Chapter of John. These names include: “The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world”, “Son of God”, “Lamb of God”, “Rabbi”, “Messiah”, “Him about whom Moses in the law and the prophets also write”, “Son of Joseph from Nazareth”, “King of Israel”, “Son of Man”, “Lamb of God”. But the image I am drawn to the most this week is John’s confession of who Jesus is, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”

The image of Jesus as Lamb of God is rooted in Old Testament imagery through a combination of images. It could come from the Passover Lamb from the Passover meal the Israelites ate in haste before leaving Egypt. It could come from the servant songs of Isaiah. It could possibly come from the image of the conquering lamb found in post-biblical Jewish end time writings. Regardless of where this influence upon John came from, they had a deep impact on John’s understanding of Jesus: “Behold the Lamb of God – the one who would take away the sins of the world!”

The original Greek word for “world” is cosmos – meaning that all of creation, and not only humanity stands in need of sins being forgiven and absolved.

This understanding, and this confession was enough for at least two of John’s disciples to begin following Jesus through a simple invitation, “come and see”. There were no computer generated directions, no cell phone applications, no satellite technology behind this invitation. Rather, a simple, three word invitation that is extended to us as well, “come and see.”

When we follow this invitation, we bring with us also our hopes, our expectations, our needs in encountering Jesus. We may not even know ourselves of the needs we bring with us. Yet Jesus does, and in those needs, meets us where we are at. In meeting us where we are at, Jesus gives us the grace, the strength, and the courage to go to others and say, “come and see”.

Throughout the Gospels, “Come and see” is a direct invitation – from someone who has experienced God’s grace within their lives to someone who is in need. “Come and see” is a matter of one beggar telling another where to find bread. Luther recognized each and every one of us to be a beggar in his comment, “We are all beggars. This much is true”. We are beggars because we are in need of God’s grace, of having that same invitation of “come and see” extended to us as well.

But there still remains a question. The remaining question is who Jesus is for us, and in that understanding, how we also invite others to come and see.

Back in 1988, I came across a devotional that raised the question of who Jesus is. Using various occupations, the devotional described Jesus:

To the Artist – Jesus is the One Altogether Lovely.

To the Architect – Jesus is the Cornerstone.

To the Athlete – Jesus is the Ultimate Goal.

To the Baker – Jesus is the Living Bread.

To the Educator – Jesus is the Great Teacher.

To the Banker – Jesus is the Hidden Treasure.

To the Biologist – Jesus is the Life.

To the Sinner – Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away sin.

The devotional continued with a Russian legend about an artist who tried to paint a portrait of Jesus. The artist could paint others successfully, but was unable to paint a portrait of Jesus. The artist finally asked Jesus why the portrait was difficult. Jesus told the artist “No one can paint a picture of Me for anyone else. If they did, it would be said that Jesus was thus and thus; every one must paint their own picture.”(from *Mountain Trailways for Youth, October 9. By Mrs. Charles Cowman. @1981 by Zondervan.*)

May we too be bold in painting our picture of who Jesus is, and may we, through God’s grace be bold in our inviting others to “come and see.” Thanks be to God! Amen.