

Discipleship in the Lectionary – 01/15/2023



A look at the week's lectionary through the lens of discipleship and disciple-making.

Second Sunday after the Epiphany

Revised Common Lectionary Year A

Sunday, January 15th

John 1:29-42

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Come and you will see

This week's lectionary text includes a reference to the baptism of Jesus from the Gospel of John. Unlike the synoptic Gospels, the Gospel of John does not provide a direct narrative of the baptism. Instead, it includes John the Baptist's witness of what happened during Jesus' baptism. The text also provides some unique insight into how Jesus called His disciples. John's account helps us to understand how our call to discipleship is a process that involves others witnessing about Jesus. In this text we recognize the role that Andrew played in bringing his brother to first meet Jesus. His brother Simon became known as Peter and the rest is history. This text challenges us to reflect on the extent of our own witness to Christ in our daily lives.

John 1:29-42 Commentary

John's Gospel opens with a prologue (1:1-18) where Jesus is presented as the eternal, preexistent and now Incarnate Word, the Son of God who is God. The Gospel then begins with the testimony of John the Baptist to the priests and Levites sent from Jerusalem to where John was baptizing. In these verses John the Baptist clarified that he was not the Messiah but is preparing the way for the one who will come after (1:19-28). The identity of the one to come is now revealed in the following verses.

²⁹ The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" ³⁰ This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.' ³¹ I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel." ³² And John bore witness: "I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. ³³ I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' ³⁴ And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God."

The day after John the Baptist was questioned by the priests and Levites, he saw Jesus and gave a clear testimony to His identity. In these few verses (1:29-34), Jesus is referred to as *the Lamb of God* (v.29), *the man who ranks before me* (v.30), *the one who the Spirit descended upon and remained upon* (v.33), *the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit* (v.33), and *the Son of God* (v.34). *The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world* connects Jesus with the lambs sacrificed every morning and evening as sin offerings for the nation of Israel only now Jesus is a single lamb, a gift from God like the sacrificial ram God provided Abraham, His blood analogous to the Passover

lamb. The Lamb of God, however, will take away the sins of the entire world (*cosmos*). No wonder shepherds were present at His birth.

³⁵ *The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples, ³⁶ *and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!"* ³⁷ *The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus.* ³⁸ *Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, "What are you seeking?" And they said to him, "Rabbi" (which means Teacher), "where are you staying?"* ³⁹ *He said to them, "Come and you will see." So they came and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour.**

John the Baptist continued his witness to Jesus. This time John was with two of his disciples. After hearing John's witness these two disciples follow Jesus. Jesus turned and asked them the question He asks of all of us, "*What are you seeking?*" Their response, "*where are you staying?*" has perhaps additional meaning. The word "staying" is a rendering of *meno*. This word is also used in v.32 where the Holy Spirit descended and *remained*. *Meno* is often rendered as "abiding" and thus has a relational meaning rather than just a place. The two disciples of John may have been asking a question to determine more about what Jesus stood for - who was He - rather than simply where He was physically lodging. Regardless, Jesus extended an invitation, "*Come and you will see.*"

⁴⁰ *One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother.* ⁴¹ *He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which means Christ).* ⁴² *He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon the son of John. You shall be called Cephas" (which means Peter).*

In v.40 the identity of one of the former disciples of John who followed Jesus is revealed. It was Andrew, the brother of Simon who would become known as Peter. It is Andrew, who after his encounter with Jesus, went to find his brother and witnessed about Jesus. Andrew also brought his brother to meet Jesus. The rest is history. The same pattern is repeated in the verses that immediately follow the lectionary text. Philip became a follower of Jesus who then brought Nathanael to meet Jesus (1:43-51).

Reflections

In addition to the clear differentiation between John the Baptist and Jesus and the high Christology found in the text, this lectionary reading also provides additional insight into how Jesus called His disciples. In the text there is a chain of witness events: God witnesses to the identity of Jesus during His baptism. John the Baptist then witnesses to two of his disciples who immediately follow Jesus. One of them, Andrew, in turn witnesses to his brother Simon and brings him to meet Jesus. This pattern continues after Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension. At this time there remained only 120 disciples gathered in the upper room in Jerusalem (Acts 1:12-15). Through an unbroken chain of witnesses empowered by the Holy Spirit, the Church has grown from this small group of disciples to the worldwide body it is today.

The cultural captivity of the church has led many to restrict the definition of witnessing as what amounts to performing acts of love and generosity. Any actual proclamation or explanation of the Gospel outside the church walls is thought by many to be offensive in our post-Christendom world. In such situations it is becoming more and more difficult to differentiate between church-led versus secular social justice actions. Is it any surprise church membership is plummeting? To others, evangelism also involves imposing one worldly culture upon another. Yet is not the Gospel the ultimate divine expression of inclusivity? Is not biblical justice the ultimate expression of social justice?

Clearly, we must first be the Gospel, but we must also proclaim the Gospel. The Gospel has the power to transform lives: "*So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ*" (Romans 10:17). It is hardly loving one's neighbor to give them a momentary temporal relief yet withhold the means to eternal relief! Is loving one's neighbor expressed by tearing down systems of injustice to one group only to replace them with systems of injustice to a different group?

We are part of this unbroken chain of witnesses. Making disciples who make disciples is our Lord's plan of growing his Church from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. Much of the institutional church has moved away from this simple biblical model. A person-person connection of John the Baptist telling Andrew who then tells his brother, has been replaced with a direct mail piece, a website, or a sign outside the church. Evangelism is now a marketing strategy better suited to a country club only sadly less effective. Witnessing is seen as solely the responsibility of the professional ministerial class rather than enabling everyone in the body to become such.

As we reflect on our own Christian witness in the form of both words and deeds, we must remember the case of Andrew. We never know the future role that God has planned for the brother or sister we are called to witness to.

Application

- Could an observer tell you are Christian by how you live?
- When was the last time you shared the Gospel?
- When was the last time you heard the Gospel?
- When was the last time you saw the Gospel?
- How much of your Christian witness is spent attempting to prove other Christians to be wrong about a point of doctrine, practice, or interpretation of a specific Scripture verse?
- What thoughts, actions, or prayer has this Scripture prompted?



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