

We are back in the Gospel of John, and we are back with John the Baptist. While last week we heard about the baptism of Jesus in Matthew, this week we get the 4th gospel's version. Unfortunately, it leaves out the actual baptism completely. We hear the testimony of John the Baptist, and then (with our reading) John sees him coming and recognizes him. But John only recognizes him because he saw the Spirit descend on Jesus when John baptized him. So here we get Jesus' baptism after-the-fact, as the revelation that prompts John to say, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

And here we have an important piece. The phrase "I myself did not know him..." appears twice in these few verses, but they end with another: "I myself have seen and testified that this is the Son of God."

You see, Jesus, the Light of the World, is new on the scene - his public ministry is only beginning. So it's fair to say that we don't yet know who this man is. Epiphany will move forward in this fashion, revealing Jesus to us slowly. For we do not yet know what it means that he is God's Son - or what that means for us. As it was with John, we too need God's revelation.

But what are we to do with revelation? John shows us: Seeing Jesus, he points and tells them who he is.

So beginning with John, in a veiled way, the word **Apostle** sits at the center of our gospel reading. Today Paul gives us the word - "called to be an apostle..." It means "**one who is chosen and sent.**" That's pretty different from Disciple isn't it (a student or follower)? John the Baptist fits the bill for "Apostle" I guess - a forerunner, preparing the way for Jesus. But the rest of our reading reveals something more about what being an "Apostle" means.

The day after that sighting, John sees Jesus again, and again calls him the Lamb of God. "Look" he says to two of his disciples. Surprisingly they do look and leave John standing there to "follow Jesus". Jesus sees them and speaks his first words of this gospel: he says to them "What are you looking for?"

I don't know my biblical languages I'm sorry to say, but the text here (as it is interpreted) is revealing. Jesus says to them "What are you looking for?" He doesn't ask them, he says to them "What are you looking for?" First, is that not a resonant question? And second it is a question, something asked. But the question Jesus identifies them, just as he does us - he says, "You're looking for something." It's not a question to Jesus, it's a question for us. What are you looking for?

These two disciples, perhaps too embarrassed to say what they're looking for, ask "Where are you staying?" They haven't answered Jesus' initial question. Rather, they've been evasive. Giving them the benefit of the doubt, perhaps it wasn't dishonest. Perhaps they just didn't know. Can you identify?

Or maybe these disciples, not knowing what they're truly after, think they'll find it wherever Jesus happens to be staying. The word here for "staying" though, is not as thin a word as it seems. It means literally "abiding" - where are you abiding Jesus? Where do you abide?

I had to look it up and this is what I found: "Abide" is a verb. It is active. Abiding in Christ is not a feeling or a belief, but something we do." Whoever wrote that wasn't Lutheran. Abiding is an active verb, but the direction of the activity matters. In other words, it's not something we do - it's what Jesus does. This Light of the world has come to abide in us.

But still what does that mean? The story goes on to tell us.

Andrew, one of the two who left John to follow this Lamb of God, had a brother named Simon who wasn't following anyone apparently. I wonder what he was looking for - or if he was looking for it at all... Call it speculation, but I think Andrew knew his brother needed something, because "He first found his brother" to say to him "We have found the Messiah."

This is key. **Andrew in this moment becomes an apostle** - chosen and sent. In Luther's words, we see Andrew clearly: "One beggar telling another where to find bread." And Simon is hungry. Jesus has told Andrew, "Come and see". And Andrew tells Simon, "Come and See." Little did Andrew know that because of this simple invitation, Jesus would see Simon tell him, "You are to be called Cephas." In other words, "Your name is Peter."

Little do we know, when we invite someone to church, what Jesus will say to them...

I want us to think about two things here. First, there are a number of really significant figures in scripture **whose names are changed by God** - they are given a new name.

Abram, the first to receive God's promises, God renames Abraham.

Jacob, Abraham's grandson receives these promises too, and is renamed Israel, becoming the one of whom God creates multitudes.

Saul, a persecutor of The Way, on his way to Damascus, is struck blind and soon becomes Paul the Apostle.

And here, Peter joins the list.

What they all have in common is that they are chosen, renamed and chosen. And then they are sent. "Get up and go" are some of their first instructions! But Peter is a little different, right? We know this Peter: We know his impulsivity, his lack of self control, his desire for certitude and his inability to follow through. He is a broken man when Jesus finds him, and that brokenness follows him into his life with Jesus as a disciple. The cock crows for us all at times, but we remember when it did for Peter.

And here's the second thing. Peter becomes an apostle, one of the heroes of the book of Acts. Remember that long after Jesus' ascension, Peter had been trying to appeal to his fellow Jews - leaving Gentile (non-Jews) to fend for themselves. But on a rooftop in Joppa, he receives a vision of animals on a bedsheet - animals Jews would have considered unclean. Peter is appalled but God tells him "What God has made clean, you must not call profane."

In our story today, Peter is chosen, given a new name. And as with the others, **a new God-given name, means a new identity in the unfolding revelation of God's promises.** It took some time for Peter, but in this story from Acts, Peter is finally sent to become an Apostle to the Gentiles.

Each of these re-named people becomes the spiritual father of multitudes - even imperfect, flawed and broken Peter. Later in Matthew, Jesus will say to him, "On this rock I will build my church (Matt 16:18)."

Well there it is. "On this rock will I build my church."

A countdown has begun with the turning of this new year. This countdown will end with a Grand-opening style worship service in the new building. Even as we watch those numbers tick down, the mud is drying and the walls are crying out for paint, light fixtures, trim, appliances, and everything else that's needed. We know that it is God who gave us the ability and the drive to build. But I tell you, people of Messiah, that building is not a church without people - people that gather, that praise, that worship, that work, that serve, that eat bread, drink wine and baptize. In other words, people who proclaim and share the good news of God in Christ. To speak it plain, "We have built a building. Now we must build the church."

Chosen and sent, beloved. That is the call of Jesus to you. Chosen and sent to be apostles of God, apostles to Red Lodge, apostles to the world. To you has been revealed the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. To you who see him, recognize him, God calls you to point and speak his name. Not only to others who also recognize him, but to those who don't. People of Messiah, becoming apostles of God: That is the only way this building becomes a church.

If that sounds scary - good! But take another look at our story. Can you hear the good news it is giving us?

Starting at the end, Simon becomes Peter - he receives a new name. People of God, have you received a new name? Yes! You were raised from the waters of baptism with a new name - Child of God, Beloved of God. That's your new name, the name that changes all other names you have. The name that says, "Chosen."

Where does Jesus abide? Jesus abides here, where two or three are gathered in his name. But because the Spirit itself washes us clean and comes to us in those waters, and because Jesus promised he would send it, the Spirit abides in you - Each of You!

We ourselves did not know him. But with John, we have received the revelation of that Spirit and the one on whom it descended from heaven like a dove. But unlike John, I guarantee that this revelation was given to you by another - a family member, a friend, a colleague, a stranger, maybe someone who invited you to church. Beggars, one to another, telling where bread is to be found. That is the only way the revelation continues to ripple outward.

In the end, then, it is not only Jesus who has been revealed, dear Messiah - it is also you, your true identity as beloved of God, as chosen and sent, as **apostles** in whom the Spirit of God abides helping us to point and speak with a gentle, persistent, simple word of invitation. "Come and See. Come and find what you're looking for."

AMEN