

**Sunday, January 19, 2020**  
**Second Sunday after the Epiphany (Year A)**

John 1.29-42

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**“A Model for Our Faith Journey”**

During the season after Epiphany, we focus on particular revelations of who Jesus is. Each Gospel reading during this season could be described as an encounter with revelation—the revelation of just who Jesus is as the Son of God. We particularly see this played out in ever increasing ways in today’s Gospel reading. But Epiphany as an encounter with revelation is not just something that we witness or experience. Epiphany also invites a response from us. No, that’s not right. Epiphany also begs a response from us. Epiphany demands a response from us.

As we heard in today’s Gospel, John the Baptist has an encounter with revelation while baptizing Jesus. As he tells his own disciples regarding Jesus, “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (Jn 1.29). He doesn’t just say, “I think this guy is the Messiah.” No, he speaks with certainty. The implication of his statement is that Jesus is more than the long-awaited Messiah. More than the warrior king who would liberate the people. No, John is certain that Jesus is a different type of Messiah. This Messiah would liberate the people in a radically new way—by taking away their sins. And not just the sins of the Jewish people, but the sin of the whole world! That’s a pretty bold statement.

John goes on to reveal the proof that he received. He recounts how when he was baptizing Jesus, he “saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove and it remained on” Jesus (Jn 1.32). As if that wasn’t enough, God spoke to John, telling him “He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit” (Jn 1.33). Based on this series of events, John is absolutely certain that Jesus is the Son of God, and with what he experienced, can now testify to that fact. This revelation is not a private experience for John alone, but is part of a bigger picture, giving John the opportunity to share his experience with others.

And John does just that. He is eager to share his encounter with two of his own disciples. “Look, here is the Lamb of God!” (Jn 1.36). John the Baptist’s choice of imagery to describe Jesus is interesting. The title “Lamb of God” is unique to the Gospel According to John and incorporates so many symbols and themes that would have been familiar to the people of his day. The image of lambs as temple sacrifices to God for the atonement of one’s sins. The image of the lambs that were slaughtered for the first Passover feast as the Israelites were preparing to flee Egypt. The blood of those same lambs painted on the lintels of the doorways as a sign to the angel of death to pass-over those houses that were homes to God’s Chosen People. The blood of the lambs that saved God’s Chosen from death and opened the way for new life in the Promised Land.

What would have particularly grabbed the attention of John’s two disciples was the fuller description of “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” As John Calvin noted in his *Commentaries*, “John, holding out Christ, testifies that he is the Lamb of God; by which he means that all the sacrifices, which the Jews were accustomed to offer under the Law, had no power whatever to atone for sins, but that they were only figures, the truth of which was

manifested in Christ himself” (John Calvin, *Commentaries*, John 1; quoted in *Synthesis*, Epiphany 2, 1/19/20). In other words, this one whom John refers to as “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” would provide something that mere temple sacrifices could not. As the Lamb who comes from God, Jesus is the one who can and will bring about atonement for their sins once and for all. The one who will bring about ultimate reconciliation between God and humanity.

John’s description of Jesus as the Lamb of God, therefore touches the core desire in the hearts of God’s people. To be delivered from their pain and suffering that comes through sin. And more importantly, to finally be reconciled with their God. Something the people had hope and longed for since the beginning of Creation.

John’s description of Jesus as the Lamb of God obviously touches the heart of John’s disciples. They, too, are searching for the true path to salvation. Hearing John’s description of Jesus is just what they need to hear. Just what they need to point them in the right direction. They thought they had found what they were looking for in John the Baptist, who preached a baptism of repentance, and so became his followers. But then, when Jesus comes on the scene, John clearly states, “This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me’” (Jn 1.30). Okay, so John’s not the one. But he knew who was the one. He had witnessed God’s confirmation of this when he baptized Jesus. By revealing who Jesus is to his disciples, John has fulfilled his purpose of pointing the way to the Messiah so that others might follow him, as well.

When John’s disciples hear this proclamation, they are immediately off to follow Jesus. And the interaction between John’s two disciples and Jesus really does epitomize what Epiphany, of what revelation of who Jesus is, is about. The first part of their exchange is a reasonably straightforward question by Jesus: “What are you looking for?” (Jn 1.38a). Jesus wants to know what they want, what he can do for them. As if he doesn’t know. But it opens the way for what follows.

The disciples respond with a question of their own: “Where are you staying?” (Jn 1.38b). A simple enough question. But this question has a far deeper meaning than appears on the surface. Mainly because, as is often the case in Scripture, the true meaning gets lost in translation. The original Greek word that here is translated as the verb “to stay” is *meno*, which more accurately means “to abide.” And while “abide” does have the basic meaning of staying someplace, it also carries a far deeper meaning. It has a sense of persistence and perseverance. It means to hold on to something and have faith in it, indicating a persistent loyalty. Throughout John’s Gospel, we see “abide” used in this deeper sense in the Christological passages that speak of the Son abiding in the Father (Fuller & Westberg, *Preaching the Lectionary: The Word of God for the Church Today*, 294). That is certainly the sense in which “staying” or “abiding” is used in the disciples’ question. “Where are you abiding?” Or maybe better put, “In what or whom do you abide?” “To what or whom are you persistently loyal?” “In what or whom do you place your deepest faith?”

Jesus is more than happy to show them. He invites them to stay with him for a while. We don’t know what happened during their time together, but whatever it was, Andrew was somehow transformed. It was enough to confirm for Andrew that Jesus is indeed who John said he is.

That Jesus is precisely who Andrew is looking for—the one to guide him into a deeper, more abiding relationship with God. Even that Jesus is the true path to salvation. Eternal salvation.

And now it is Andrew's turn to share his experience of revelation. He does not keep the experience of Jesus to himself, but goes off to find his brother Simon. He shares his assessment: "We have found the Messiah" (Jn 1.41) and brings Simon to meet Jesus for himself. And upon meeting Simon, Jesus welcomes him as a seeker, as well. He even gives Simon a new name to signify the transformation that will occur in Peter's life.

The interaction between John's disciples and Jesus and the subsequent response of Andrew in bearing witness to his brother that Jesus is the Messiah serves as a model for our faith journey. A model contained in two seemingly simple questions and two seemingly simple statements:

"What are you looking for?"

"Where are you staying?"

"Come and see."

"We have found the Messiah."

"What are you looking for?" This is the fundamental question that we need to ask ourselves. To discern what we need to help set us on the path to right relationship with God and to obtain salvation.

"Where are you abiding?" This is the fundamental thing that we seek in our relationship with God. To learn just what is the fundamental truth that we have faith in—namely the nature of our relationship with God. To figure out how to enter into and nurture abiding relationship with God—the relationship that nurtures us and gives us true life.

"Come and see." That is the invitation that Christ issues to us. This is the invitation the Church issues to us and all who seek. To come and see what this place has to offer. To come and see how this community provides hope and hospitality in the midst of a broken and hurting world. To come and see how this community manifests the love of God.

"We have found the Messiah." While we may not directly make this proclamation, Andrew's statement is symbolic of our own acknowledgement that we have found what we are searching for. But even more so, expressing that joy at finding that place where we, too, can abide. And then serving as a proclamation of the desire and the willingness to share that with others. This emphasizes that telling others about the truth of Jesus is essential to the life of faith. Just as John did not keep what he had experienced to himself, and Andrew did not keep what he had experienced to himself, we, likewise are moved to share with others our experience of abiding in Christ.

Simple questions, simple statements, which hold far deeper meaning and significance than appears on the surface. Which systematically reveal the ultimate truth of who Jesus is. Providing an encounter with revelation that leads us to what we truly seek, to the one in whom we abide.