

John 1:29-42a
Second Sunday after the Epiphany
January 18, 2026 (Confession of St Peter)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples, and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, "What are you seeking?" And they said to him, "Rabbi... where are you staying?"

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Last week, we meditated on Jesus' baptism and its purpose to identify him (epiphany him) as the Chosen of God who would come to fulfill all of God's righteous plans and to bless all waters of the old creation to be waters for the inheritance of the new creation and the lavish washing away of sin.

This morning's text picks up with 'the next day', with the immediate aftermath of Jesus' baptism. And, immediately, we hear the ultimate proclamation of John's forerunner purpose: "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." That *is* what the forerunner was sent to precede and point to, wasn't it? Yes, he may have come calling sinners to repentance, but not as a means unto itself, as if by their repentance they would earn God's favor. No, he called them to a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins... or, you might say, anticipating the forgiveness of sins... to come *where*, to come *how*? What his Jewish hearers knew from of

old was that atonement and forgiveness came through the sacrificial lamb, the scapegoat upon whose head and shoulders were laid all the sins of the people before that scapegoat was driven outside the camp to be slaughtered as their substitute sin-bearer. So, if the people of old were regularly called to come in repentance to place their sins upon *their* chosen scapegoat, that sacrificial lamb about to be sacrificed outside the camp, then “Behold, the Lamb of God (that *God* chose), who takes away the sin of the world” ... who takes it away precisely by taking it upon himself, the sin-bearer, the scapegoat, the substitute.

This is John’s ultimate purpose as forerunner – to proclaim this great truth, now incarnate and in the flesh! – that the Lamb of God is now on the scene. And John *knows* that is his ‘final act’, if you will, and his commentary in our text *shows* that he knows it: “*This is he* of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me’ For *this* purpose, I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel.” There, in John’s word, is the culminating purpose of John drawing crowds out to the Jordan and John baptizing Jesus – it’s all about the epiphany of Jesus. This is what John was sent to do... even as John himself testifies: “He who *sent* me... said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’” Notice, by John’s own description, that God divinely *sent* John, divinely

instructed John, and divinely ensured that Jesus was made known to be the Son of God, come in human likeness to be the Lamb of God.

And, if that's the whole culminating point of John's ministry, then we immediately begin to see the effects, for the second half of the text, occurring the next day, show the *result* of John's proclamation: "Behold the Lamb of God!" And (the text says), the two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus.

Isn't that a window into the power of the Word – "Faith comes by hearing"? And isn't it also a microcosm of the proclamation into all the world and even into your own ears? If you ever wanted to put yourself into the Scriptural text, here's your genuine opportunity! For John's pointing is for your benefit just as much as for the two disciples before you. Just as much for your benefit, because you are just as much in need of the Lamb of God to take away your sins, just as much in need of dwelling with Jesus. Isn't that about all that the disciples can utter when Jesus asks them why they follow him?

"What are you seeking?" he asks. And, perhaps we're reading into it, but it seems the disciples don't really know what else to say, but "Rabbi, where are you staying?"

It's an interesting thought, whether or not the disciples were caught flat-footed by the question... perhaps because, putting ourselves into the text, would *you* be caught flat-footed by the Christ's question to you and *of* you?

What are *you* seeking when John calls you to behold the Lamb of God? Do you know how to answer that? Are your expectations of the Christ met by a scapegoat substitute upon the cross? Or were you hoping for a different gospel? A gospel that has to do with subjective feelings, or material gain, or comfortable living... but not really a gospel that respects and contends with the danger of sin, death, and condemnation?

That's always how Old Adam (that old sinner within) defines this word, "gospel," isn't it? He's always thinking about what will serve his selfish interests and will offer him a life free from any trials, any of his own cross-bearing. He's never worried about sin because he's always self-righteous. (Why would I worry about sin when I think I'm perfect?!) Instead, he's worried about finding ways to be rid of cross-bearing, worried about comfort levels, being entertained, being popular, being satisfied – not a satisfaction with Christ for those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, but a satisfaction with daily bread for those who hunger and thirst in gluttony and sloth and creature-comfort appetites. Or maybe Old Adam's concerns appear far more weighty, far more legitimate... like sickness and loss of life... but he doesn't know or care what sin has to do with it; he just wants to be promised restored health and eternal life in this fallen creation forever. Or maybe Old Adam has run himself down to the point of despair; his self-righteousness has been all but snuffed out by the heavy hand of the law wearing away his daily life.

But his self-righteousness now takes the tenor of despair, because he's either too proud to be helped by a Christ or – still wanting to define the gospel according to his own status – he worries he has proven himself too lowly *to* be helped by a Christ.

In any of those hypotheticals – which may very well describe elements of your own daily life – would we really be confident to answer the Christ's question, "What are you seeking?" Or would your answer betray the fact that you've been thinking about daily life all wrong... thinking about it apart from *eternal* life?

Or, perhaps you say, "Well, I know this is the gospel, but I don't see how it's relevant for daily life?"

But, perhaps this is where it's helpful to go back to the disciples' question: "Where are you *staying*?" Sometimes, we think of redemption as a one-time transaction with a one-time benefit – "justification!" – as if, from there, we simply wander away from the foot of the cross, justified but not knowing what to do next. But redemption isn't just about a one-time transaction; it's about the unity, the fellowship with God and His Church, that is ours because the Lamb of God has taken away our sin so as to reconcile us to the Father and live with fervent love toward one another. "Where are you staying?" – in other words, "If we get to just *be* with Jesus, just *dwell* with Jesus" doesn't that indicate not just reconciliation with God and a clear conscience before God and therefore safety in

Satan's accusation against our sin), but also *fellowship* and daily-life living in unity with God... and, if with God, then with one another?

How did the disciples confess it on the night of Jesus' resurrection, on that road to Emmaus?: "Stay with us, Lord, for it is evening." That, friends, is the Gospel. You have a God who is willing to *stay* with you. You have a God who is willing to *dwell* with you. Not just redeem you and free you to live in lonely solitude you reframe as "independence." Instead, He's willing to dwell with you in the fellowship renewed, the fellowship He had with Adam and Eve.

Luther believed that Adam and Eve sinned on the eighth day, which means their day of rest they spent dwelling with God, walking with him in the garden, with no care of time, with no goal or agenda, with no expectation of a better tomorrow (because what can be better than dwelling with God forever?).

In the same way, your day of rest is one spent dwelling with God *precisely because* the Lamb of God has taken away your sin that – in Christ – you may simply desire to be wherever *he* is staying, wherever *he* is dwelling. Indeed, *more intimately than that*, even more intimately than Adam and Eve could ever know in their perfection (!), God is willing to dwell with you in very flesh and blood. This is the breathtaking benefit hidden in those words "the Lamb of God"... the Lamb of God needed to be flesh and blood, something Adam and Eve were only promised, but never realized in their daily life. But that Lamb of God has come into the world – flesh

and blood – that his disciples may ask, “Where are you staying?” and, awestruck by the incarnate reality of His dwelling, they may quietly rejoice that their Christ is among them tangibly, truly.

You can say all you want, “Imagine what those disciples must have talked about with Jesus for that evening after the tenth hour of the day!” But, *you* dwell with him just as truly... no need to worry about what hour it is... no need for clocks, for watches... no need to worry what else in all the world you might supposedly be missing out on... because you dwell with Christ and he with you: “This is my body; this is my blood; for you” (that’s the gift that is the Lamb of God, isn’t it?), “for the forgiveness of sins” – exactly that for which the forerunner had prepared you.

And if that dwelling with the Lamb of God, that dwelling with Christ is an essential gift of the true gospel, realized in the Divine Service more intimately than any other moment in history, then don’t you have every reason to learn from Andrew? – who rejoiced so richly in this dwelling with Christ that he went to his brother: “Simon, we have found the Messiah!”

For all the programmatic concepts of evangelism in our day – door-to-door canvassing, online media, evangelism activities like free car washes or handing out water bottles – for all the ideas of ‘marketing’ the Gospel, Andrew outshines them all. He goes and tells his brother.

Now, you rightly wanted to put yourselves in the shoes of the disciples of this text; so learn from Andrew. Go tell your brother, sister, your father, mother, spouse, children, extended family, friends, neighbors.

It's about this point that Old Adam rears his head again, starts to make excuses: "Well, they *have* their own religion." Perhaps so, but do they have Christ? (Who cares if they have a *religion*; do they have Christ?) "Well, yeah, in their own way, they acknowledge that Jesus died on the cross?" But, do they have the Christ *dwelling* with them? The life of Word and Sacrament is not an invention of the Lutheran confession. The life of Word and Sacrament was instituted by Christ himself, that his disciples who simply desired to dwell with Him could hear him beckon, "Come and see." Do your family and friends have *that* great treasure in whatever religion or church body they dwell? Or are they dwelling there thinking about and learning about a distant Christ in the heavens, but not able to *dwell* with Christ, because their teachers refuse to give them Christ, as Christ promised?

"But, pastor, they're not eager for it; they're not interested." Does the text ever say Peter was eager or interested? Or, did the Holy Spirit simply work through the Word, for faith comes by hearing – "Brother," Andrew said, "We have found the Messiah." And he brought his brother to Jesus.

Today – January 18th – the church calendar commemorates the confession of St. Peter: “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.” Would Peter have ever become known for *that* confession if his brother did not first make the simple, but good confession to Peter: “We have found the Messiah!” Who knows what joyous confession will one day resound forth because you, in quiet simplicity, say even to your loved ones who *know about, think about, believe in* the Messiah, that Messiah of a distance (even Peter, recall, knew that Messiah was a distant truth, who would one day come)... who knows what joy will one day flow from their lips and lives because you did not leave them merely in a ‘belief of the Messiah,’ but are able to bring them to Him, where He may be found, as He has promised, in Word and Sacrament... that you may say: “Loved one, we have found the Messiah.”

Never underestimate the importance of that distinction of simply believing on a distant Christ, but rejoicing that He comes to us in Word and Sacrament. Sadly, it’s often seen as a *Lutheran* distinctive: that which sets apart the Lutheran confession from every other is not merely that it believes in Jesus, but that it takes seriously the promises of God that, in the Lamb of God and his flesh and blood, once on a cross now on an altar, we get to dwell with Jesus. That’s not a *Lutheran* distinctive; that’s a *true-Gospel* distinctive (as opposed to all those gospels mixed and mingled with human reasoning or human effort or simply different doctrine, promises,

and hopes)... the true-Gospel distinctive is that, even today, the disciples of Christ can beg, “Stay with us, Lord” ... and he does not disappoint... for, in the forgiveness of sins, we are forever reconciled to God, in fellowship with God, weekly served by God, and thus we may simply dwell with God.

In the Name of the Father
And of the Son
And of the Holy Spirit.
+ AMEN +

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