

Year A: Epiphany 2a – Is 49:1-7; Ps 40:1-12; 1Cor 1:1-9; Jn 1:29-42
St. Barnabas, Florissant – January 19, 2020

Focus Sentence: We need to imitate/emulate John the Baptist in his role of pointing to Jesus, “Look, here is the Lamb of God.”

SERMON

I offer these thoughts in the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit....

We are now in the midst of the Epiphany season, which runs from January 6 (the actual Feast of the Epiphany) until Ash Wednesday, the first day of Lent. Epiphany comes from the Greek, and means “a revealing” or “a showing forth.” On January 6, we commemorate the “revealing” or “showing forth” of Jesus as the Savior of the *whole* world to the Magi, eastern (and certainly Gentile) scholars who had come in search of the Jewish Messiah.

Last Sunday, our Gospel passage described the Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River by John the Baptist, and the “revealing” of Jesus as the “Beloved Son” in whom God is well-pleased. Bible scholars aren’t sure just how much of this “revealing,” as described in the three Synoptic Gospels, was made only to Jesus, to Jesus and John, or to the entire group of people gathered at the Jordan River that day.

However that may be, today’s passage from John’s Gospel gives us a different slant on the Baptism of Jesus, because here, John the Baptist testifies that he DID see the Holy Spirit descend on Jesus in the form of a dove, and remain with Jesus. And so this vision has convinced the Baptist that Jesus is indeed the Messiah, the Anointed, the Son of God.

PAUSE

John the Baptist here takes on himself the Epiphany role of “revealer” or “forth-show-er” for Jesus when he points to Jesus and tells two of his own followers, “Look, here is the Lamb of God!”

These two followers of John the Baptist hear him say this and, we're told, follow Jesus. When Jesus turns and asks them what they're looking for, they reply, "Rabbi, where are you staying?"and, presumably, "Can we come with you?"

PAUSE

Jesus says, "Come and see," and this is the invitation to faith that Jesus offers to each one of us. There's no coercion here, and no persuasive arguing on Jesus' part; there's just the simple invitation to *come and see*. For me, this calls to mind another passage, which we heard this past Advent season. John the Baptist is in prison in that passage, is wondering about Jesus and his ministry, and sends some of his disciples to Jesus to ask whether he is "the One who is to come" or should we wait for someone else. Jesus' response to John's followers is simply, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them." Again, no coercion or arguing; simply an invitation to see and to come to faith.

PAUSE

Going back to this morning's Gospel passage, John tells his followers that Jesus is the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" John's followers would certainly be aware of the many and various lamb images in the Jewish sacrificial system: the sin-offering lamb, the Passover lamb, even the warrior lamb of the apocalyptic literature. Which image was in the writer's mind? We really don't know for sure, but all of these could actually be applied to Jesus.

PAUSE

OK, but what does all of this have to do with us here and now in 2020?

I'd like, for a moment, to go back to our reading from the Hebrew Scriptures.

If you recall, the passage is from Isaiah, and describes the vocation of the "Servant." "The LORD called me before I was born, while I was in my mother's womb he named me. He made my mouth like a sharp sword. ...he said to me, 'You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified.'"

That sounds a whole lot like Jesus, whose words will indeed become like a double-edged sword. Later, the LORD says that the servant's task will be to bring Jacob back to him, and that Israel might be gathered to God. As Jesus told the Syro-Phoenecian woman, "I was sent to the lost children of Israel." But here God *broadens* the call of the Servant when he adds, "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel; I will give you as a light to the *nations*, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

Just as God promised Abraham, way back in Genesis, "I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you.....and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." God doesn't think small; salvation and blessing aren't only for Israel, but for all people.

PAUSE

And so, my question again: what does all this mean for us today?

Well, just like the Servant in Isaiah, like Abraham, and like Jesus, we too are called to be a light, to be a blessing, to the entire world, in whatever way each one of us encounters that "world" in our everyday lives.

Teresa of Avila, the Carmelite nun and mystic, put it this way:

"Christ has no body now on earth but yours,
 No hands but yours,
 No feet but yours,
 Yours are the eyes through which to look out with
 Christ's compassion to the world;
 Yours are the feet with which he is to go about doing good;
 Yours are the hands with which he is to bless men now."

That is definitely a holy and noble calling we have from God. But it's not to say that it's an easy one. Even the Servant in Isaiah laments, "I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity." I'm sure that each one of us wonders from time to time if what we're trying to do for our neighbors really makes any difference.

But always remember: God doesn't call us to be *successful*; God calls us to be *faithful*.

We can do nothing better than share in God's mission to this world, and a big part of that sharing involves our imitation of John the Baptist when he points to Jesus and says, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!" If we can point the way, no matter how small our efforts may seem, if we can point the way to Jesus for even one person, and aid in enabling them to hear those words of Jesus, "Come and see," then we, like John the Baptist, will be Epiphany people too.

PAUSE

I'd like to close these reflections by asking you to join with me in reciting again the words of today's Collect; you'll find it on the front page of the Lectionary insert.....

Almighty God, whose Son our Savior Jesus Christ is the light of the world: Grant that your people, illumined by your Word and Sacraments, may shine with the radiance of Christ's glory, that he may be known, worshipped, and obeyed to the ends of the earth; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, now and for ever.

AMEN.