

THE LAMB OF GOD

A Sermon for Ordinary Time
Sunday, January 19, 2014
First Presbyterian Church
Marianna, Florida
Ted W. Land, Interim Pastor

JOHN 1:29-42

Several years ago, Tom Long, probably the best known living Presbyterian preacher, or maybe just the best living Presbyterian preacher, led a workshop that I attended. Actually, I planned the workshop. It focused on the topic of his book, "Testimony" and how important (and how difficult) it is for us to talk about Jesus, and about what Jesus has done for us, and about who Jesus is.

What we have here in our lesson this morning are a couple of excellent examples of testimonies.

John the Baptist gives his testimony about Jesus: "Here is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world...I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him...I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God."

The next day, when John says, "Look, here is the Lamb of God," two of his disciples followed Jesus.

One of those disciples, Andrew, goes to his brother, Simon, who will become Peter, and says, "We have found the Messiah!" And he brings his brother to Jesus.

Jesus is the Lamb of God. He is the Messiah. He is truly, as John said, the sacrificial lamb upon whom the sins of the world are placed, and who will die for those sins.

He is also, as Andrew said, the Anointed One of God.

Both John and Andrew serve as examples of the effectiveness of personal testimony.

John tells what he believes, and what he had experienced, and it motivates two others to follow Jesus.

Do you realize what would happen if everyone in this church told two other people how they felt about Jesus, and it caused those two people to follow Jesus?

Wait! We don't know how many were there when John gave his testimony! There may have been twenty. Maybe twelve. But two were moved to follow Jesus. And they didn't follow Jesus the first time he told them about Him. It was the second telling that got them to follow Jesus.

I guess the point is that even an effective eye witness testimony doesn't move everyone to follow Jesus. Another point is that just because you gave your testimony once isn't enough. A second, a third, a millionth telling may be necessary before someone hears and responds.

One of those two who followed Jesus, Andrew, was moved to offer his own testimony, and bring his own brother to Jesus. Not both. Just one. Fifty per cent success. Just average.

Now I'm not real good at math, but what would happen to this church if everyone in it offered their testimony twice? What if every one here got two other people to follow Jesus? What if one of the ones they recruited recruited another?

I'm not talking about growth of this church; I'm talking about growth of the kingdom of God, or the Church Universal.

What difference would it make in this world, in this community, if two of your friends who aren't following Jesus now began to follow Jesus? What difference would it make in your family if you introduced your brother, or your sister, or your cousin, who doesn't know Jesus, to the Messiah? What difference would it make to them? Would their lives be better, richer, fuller? Would they have a hope of heaven that they lack now?

It is just good manners, just common courtesy to introduce one friend to another. Introducing other people to Jesus is just a matter of common courtesy. It is just good manners. Don't think about it as witness, as evangelism, as testimony. It is just talking about one friend to another.

Don't know what to say? Does it really matter what you say? Jonah in the Old Testament is a really good example of how unimportant the message is. Remember Jonah's testimony? "Yet forty days, and Nineveh will be destroyed!" He walked through the streets of that great city for three days, proclaiming his message of doom, and the king ordered every one to put on sackcloth and ashes, and repent of their sins, even down to the animals of the city.

Notice he repeated the message. He didn't say it just once.

I want to tell you about a little boy's profession of faith, many years ago. He sat next to a beloved lady in a small town church a whole lot like this one. Every Sunday, the preacher said the same words, after the prayer of confession, as the assurance of pardon. He said, "In Jesus Christ our sins are freely and fully forgiven."

One Sunday, the little boy turned to the lady and said, "He really believes that." She simply nodded.

The next Sunday, the lad turned to her and asked, "Do you really believe that?" Again, she nodded.

The Sunday after that, when the preacher said those words, he turned to her, and with a smile on his face said, "I really believe that, too."

That little boy celebrated his fortieth birthday a week or so ago, and he still believes that in Jesus Christ our sins are fully and freely forgiven.

The Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world does that for little boys, and He does that for elderly ladies, and He does that for each and every one of us who are able to confess our sins and accept His forgiveness.

What do you believe about Jesus that is worth sharing with someone else? That is your testimony. It may be, "Since I became a Christian, I sleep better at night, because I don't feel guilty for my sins anymore." I heard that testimony once.

It may be, "I know I'm going to heaven when I die. And I want you to be there with me." I heard a mother say that to her child once.

William Barclay, that great old Scottish Bible scholar, in his commentary on this passage tells us two things that are of great importance if we would have an effective testimony, if we would cause others to become disciples.

The first is about John the Baptist: Barclay says "we see (him) pointing beyond himself." It isn't about him, it is about Jesus. Barclay continues: "He must have known very well that to speak to his disciples about Jesus like that was to invite them to leave him and to transfer their loyalty to this new and greater teacher; and yet he did it. There was no jealousy in John. He came to attract men not to himself, but to Christ. There is no harder task than to take second place when once the first place has been enjoyed. But once Jesus had emerged on the scene John never had any other thought than to send men to Him."
(The Gospel of John, Vol. I, p 69)

The second testimony in our passage is about Jesus. Barclay notes: "So the two disciples followed Jesus. It may well be that they were too shy to approach Him directly, and that they followed respectfully some distance behind. And then Jesus did something that is entirely characteristic of Him. He turned and spoke to them. That is to say, He met them half way. He made things easier for them. He opened the door that they might come in. Here we have a symbol of the divine initiative. It is always God who takes the first step. When the human mind begins to seek and the human heart begins to long, God comes to meet us far more than half way. God does not leave (us) to search and search until we come to Himself; God goes out to meet (us). As (Saint) Augustine said, we could not even have begun to seek for God unless God had already found us. When we

go to God we do not go to one who hides Himself and keeps us at a distance; we go to one who stands waiting for us, and who even takes the initiative by coming to meet us on the road.” (*Ibid.*)

But you know, even though God is always coming out to meet us, like the father in the parable of the prodigal son, there are still some folks that need someone to introduce them. They may be shy; they may be fearful; they may be polite, or just standoffish.

That is where Andrew comes in. Now we know a great deal about John the Baptist. We know he preached and baptized at the River Jordan, that he wore camel's hair, and ate locusts and wild honey.

And Simon Peter, well, we all know that Saint Peter will hold the keys to the kingdom, and that he was the first Pope, thus being strongly identified with the Roman Catholic Church. Saint Peter is also the patron saint of fishermen.

But Andrew, Peter's brother, is lesser known. He was not one of the inner three, along with Peter, James and John. Andrew seems always willing to take the back seat, to allow others to be first. He brought his brother to Jesus, and it was upon that brother that Jesus said He would build His church. And that doesn't seem to have bothered Andrew a bit. Andrew didn't say, "Well, if I can't be the one you build the church on, I'll go build my own." He just kept on being Andrew, always bringing people to meet Jesus, always introducing people to Jesus.

Andrew is the patron saint of Scotland. As such, I guess that makes him the patron saint of golfers. After all, golf was invented at "The Royal and Ancient" in Scotland, at St. Andrews.

If we Presbyterians were to get to pick a patron saint, with our Scottish heritage, and the number of golfers among us, I guess it ought to be Saint Andrew. And we ought to follow his example: we ought to be the ones who are always bringing people to Jesus. We ought to be the ones who are always introducing people to the one who is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, the Messiah.