

Isaiah 49:1-7
1 Corinthians 1:1-9
John 1:29-42

John 1:29-42

²⁹The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" ³⁰This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.' ³¹I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel." ³²And John testified, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. ³³I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' ³⁴And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God."

³⁵The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, ³⁶and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!" ³⁷The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. ³⁸When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, "What are you looking for?" They said to him, "Rabbi" (which translated means Teacher), "where are you staying?" ³⁹He said to them, "Come and see." They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon. ⁴⁰One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. ⁴¹He first found his brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated Anointed). ⁴²He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas" (which is translated Peter).

John the Baptist had done his job; he had accomplished his mission in life. Before he had ever laid eyes on Jesus he told anyone who would listen to him that his purpose in life was to prepare the way for the coming of the Christ...and now Christ had come.

The Gospel reads: "And John testified, 'I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, "He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit." And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God.' The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, 'Look, here is the Lamb of God!' The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus."

Perhaps there were mixed emotions for John. His disciples were leaving him - men whom he had taught and led and lived with...but I hope he felt mostly joy. John had fulfilled his purpose. He had pointed to Jesus and his disciples didn't hesitate. They followed Jesus.

Maybe you've felt that kind of joy. Can you think of a time when you have tried to point the way to Christ and, against all odds, you saw your efforts have effect? You saw a person or some people turn toward Jesus, even if it meant they were no longer thinking about your wisdom or goodness.

The disciples we read about this morning were really looking. They were not afraid of change. John had taught them well. They were John's disciples, but they were not serving John; they were serving God. And if God pointed them in another direction – they would not hesitate. John had told his disciples to follow God.

Think how it would have been if those disciples had misplaced their loyalty. What if John had said, "Look! The lamb of God!" and the disciples had responded, "Yeah, there he goes. We'll stay with **you** John. **You're** our teacher. We like things the way they are. We're comfortable with our religion the way it is." They might have thought they were paying a great compliment to John that they would rather stay with him...and it would have broken John's heart. He would have failed in his mission.

Instead, John was joyously "abandoned" by his disciples – because their loyalty was not to John. It was to God. John had taught them well and they knew that they must go looking for God, wherever that might lead. They had to find out God's will for them. That meant leaving John and all that they were used to, even though they were used to no less than John the Baptist, the greatest prophet in history. It was time to grow. Growth means change.

There is joy in this story, but there is a frightening aspect to it as well. Growth means change and change can be scary. Change can come too fast. We might see that a change needs to be made, but when the time comes it can shake us.

It might be time for a child to leave home. Perhaps we've come to a different understanding of what we should do with our lives. Maybe our commitments to the church should be deeper. Perhaps we should rethink how we spend our time.

How willing are we to change? If a prophet came to us this morning...John the Baptist, or any of the hundreds who have come since, or the next one – whoever God sends us next – if any prophet came walking in right now and interrupted the sermon and said, “Look, the lamb of God” and then the prophet pointed us clearly in the direction we should go to follow the lamb...I wonder if I would step down and shake the prophet’s hand and tell him I’m glad he could visit, and I hope he comes again, and invite him to our next pot-luck –but tell him I’m not really looking for a change a right now.

God is never shy about pointing the way to follow his son. But it requires us to grow and change and follow him wherever he leads.

If we are going to be followers of the Lamb of God we must not only accept change, we must bring it about. That is our job as Christians – growth and change. We can see that the Kingdom of God does not reign perfectly in all corners of creation and, until it does, we have changes to make. God plans to use us as he used John the Baptist, as he used the Baptist’s disciples, as he used one of the disciples’ brother, Simon Peter. God plans to use us to make changes.

Our Old Testament lesson speaks of the use God will make of us in terms of God going out to do battle with a sinful world. He will use us as his weapons in that battle to make changes. “He made my mouth like a sharp sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me a polished arrow, and in his quiver he hid me away.” You are swords and arrows that God will use to bring about the mission of his church in the world. As swords and arrows, you probably should not expect to be welcomed by that world. Experience guarantees us that if you are genuinely committed to bringing about a change for God’s Kingdom, you will stir up fright and, possibly, hatred. People usually don’t want to change. John the Baptist, the success story from this morning’s Gospel lesson, was beheaded. Tradition holds that a character who is mentioned for the first time in this lesson, Simon Peter, was crucified. They called for change.

They all said, "Look! There's the Lamb of God." They all made it their business to see to it that no one was so happy with the way things already were that they refused to get up and follow Christ.

Let's give ourselves a chance for the same joy John the Baptist experienced. Let's point to Christ and try to get people to turn their backs on us so they can follow him.

Let's change the church. Let's make it grow. Let's live constantly on our toes, always prepared to get up and follow the Lamb of God. Let's ask the same question we read in this Gospel lesson, "Jesus, where are you staying?" Sometimes we concentrate on the wrong question. We are concerned with where we have been staying. We measure our faith in terms of familiarity. We teach a message of staying with what we are used to – and loyalty to God can devolve into meaning nothing more than doing what we have always done.

John the Baptist's mission was accomplished when his disciples left him. They did not stay with what was familiar. They went the direction John pointed and they asked Jesus where he was staying.

Our focus is on where Jesus is leading, not where we have been staying.

We must change. We must meet changing times, changing values. We must meet new challenges and we must serve a new world. Our church will always be changing because our mission is always the same. Our mission is to follow the Lamb of God where ever he leads.