

January 15, 2017

Called to Hear, See, Follow, and Point

PRAYER

May the words of my mouth be mediations of our hearts and be always acceptable unto Thee. O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. AMEN

SERMON

A week ago, last Friday we entered the season of Epiphany. That season where we recall the revealing of Jesus as the Messiah, the Christ, the Anointed one of God. Not only to the people of Israel but to all the world. Last Sunday, we had the revelation when Jesus came to John. The one who was baptizing in the Jordan River. People from all over Israel and Judah were coming to him to hear his message. Repent, be baptized, prepare for what God is about to do. He was proclaiming that God was doing something new and something different and the people had to prepare. And then we had Jesus come to John to be baptized. And we hear about that baptism when Jesus comes back up out of the water. The Spirit of God comes upon him like a dove and a voice from Heaven, "This is my son, the beloved, with whom I am well pleased." He is revealed as more than just one of the great things that had come out to hear John preach and be baptized. He was the one that John was proclaiming.

The reading for this morning is that next day Jesus still in the area. Comes back to where John is baptizing and John now is going from being the proclaimer to be ready to pointing out the Lamb of God. Look, there he is, that is the one that I have been talking about. I didn't even know his name, I wasn't even sure who it was but God told me to watch for the signs, to watch for the Spirit of God descend. This is the one. He is the Lamb of God and he is the Son of God. Now John has been baptizing for some time now and people had begin to not only come to be baptized and then return to their home. There were some who became his disciples, they wanted to follow. They thought he had the message that they needed to hear. And they wanted to be like him, they wanted to be taught by him but when they heard him point out. This is the one, this is the anointed one, this is the son of God. They choose to then follow, they wanted to learn more, they wanted to see who this Jesus was and what he was going to do. Was he going to be the image that so many had of the Messiah, a new Davidic King who would raise up Israel to be the great power in all the world so that God's light could be shown on everyone? Or was it going to be something different? They didn't know.

But once he was pointed out, they wanted to follow and find out for themselves. And that was the beginning. And as they followed, Jesus asked that question, "What are you looking for?" And I'm sure the disciples didn't know exactly how to answer that. Well you know you were pointed out. We want to see what you were about. Rabbi, teacher, teach us. We want to follow and be taught. And then it begins. And he calls other disciples. And he goes throughout all of Judah, all of Israel and he invites people to become part of the kingdom of God. He brings them near so that they can find out who he is. He heals those who are sick, and those who are blind, and those who are lame. He preaches good news to the poor. He begins to live out what it is to be the Christ, the anointed one of God. And to be the light that shines out of the darkness so that all can receive that invitation. Invitation to repent, invitation to follow, invitation to become children of God.

John has gone from being a voice preparing, to a witness, to one who now points others to who Jesus is and what Jesus is about. Even though he himself did not know fully. Even at that point, didn't know fully. Later on, we hear in John that he sends disciples to Jesus while he himself is in prison. Are you the one, I need to know. He didn't know that life expectancy in prison at that time was not very long. And it wasn't for John. I need to know for sure. And again, the response to John's disciples. Tell him what you see, point to what's going on and then he will know. In his heart of hearts, he will know.

That's the progression that that we all have, that's the progression that the church has. Someone has to reveal who Jesus is to every generation, voices in the living out of their lives. This is who Jesus is, this is who Jesus was in the first century and this is the Jesus that had the time to teach, to go through the passion, to suffer death, and to be raised from the dead. This is who the anointed one is. Not the Davidic King for a generation but the son of God for all generations. The one who forgives sins, the one who has an invitation to become part of God's kingdom, an invitation to become children of God for every generation.

And we hear or we see in the life of people around us, a voice that cries out this is who Jesus is. Our day, now, this is who Jesus is. We see it in the lives of people who are following because to hear about Jesus, to receive that knowledge and to begin to follow. That is a beginning. As we follow, as we see others point to who this Jesus is. This is what Jesus is like. As they see someone go into the world and proclaim light in the darkness. As they bring healing and wholeness to the those who are lost, who are broken. Always pointing not to themselves but to this anointed one, the son of God. Who enables them through the Holy Spirit given in baptism to perform the duties of a follower of a citizen of God's kingdom as a child of God.

We are called to hear, to see, to follow, and then point out. We don't always have to be the one that is the one pointed to. We are called to live our lives reflecting the love of God, the piece of God, the wholeness of God that is found in Jesus Christ. But there are others that we also point to. One of the benefits of going to seminary is you are given not only the opportunity but actually forced to read about some of the saints in history. And how they live their lives following Jesus and how they changed over time. As they discovered how rich and how full and unknowable Jesus is. And to follow with all their heart and mind and strength to show that Jesus to the world. To present that Jesus to the world. And some of the things that they were inspired to say by the Spirit of God inspires people today.

And people who are living today, who are following, who are becoming more and more a reflection of who Jesus was, who God calls us to be. They are pointing to Jesus living in our own time, living in our own world. Showing us where we can go, showing us what we are to do, showing us what it is to be free to fear. Showing us what it is to be free to give of oneself but not worry about being diminished. But only following and becoming more and more of the child of God that they are invited to be.

One of the other things that we have in our time and one of the few and one of the nice things about social media for me. Not that there are a lot but one of the things that is a real positive is I am connected to old classmates of mine. I am connected to other friends that I have made over the years, other clergy and what I often see in their posts on Facebook is the words of others who have inspired them. The Dietrich Bonhoeffer's of the world. The Mother Theresa's. And what I have discovered is some make posts that I am either familiar with or that I am inspired by because it reflects the Jesus I have come to know. A Jesus of love and grace. A Jesus that wants to wrap his arms around every individual and let his love come through them, infuse them so that they know the love of God. So, that

they can become the person, the child of God that Christ wants them to be. That God wants them to be. And sometimes I see a post, I have a very dear friend from high school, we actually dated in high school. And she comes from a culture, her mother was Japanese, her father was American, and she has become what some would call kind of new age. She understands all the crystals and what the benefits that they are supposed to give and provide. I don't know about that, that's not my thing. But I see in her post a spirituality that speaks to me of who Christ is without ever mentioning Christ. That may reflect the thoughts of Buddhists or the words of the Dalai Lama or other sources that she gets these from. But it speaks of relationship, and it speaks of peace, and it speaks of love of the holy one. The God. And I find that in sharing these, I am enriched and I see other perspectives of who Jesus is without the word or the name Jesus ever being spoken.

And I had another high school friend who like me is not a priest but a pastor of a church. Much more conservative approach, who had Jesus revealed to him. Who often posts from a Christian writer from the last century who sees Jesus very differently than I do. Who sees Jesus as one who calls us to follow the law. Be steadfast in that. Whatever the law may be, whether we like what it has to say how we treat others or not, it is about following that law and being the follower of God that we all should be. And what I found in this is that there is no one way to see God, and no one right way to see God and Jesus Christ. That even though I disagree with much of what Vernon posts, it's okay, he's not wrong. And it helps him to lead that life and to continue to follow the path that he has found makes sense to him. He understands God in this way, he understands Jesus in this way, and that's okay. He's not wrong. Not the way I see it. And it's not the way I follow. But I'm not wrong either. God is big enough to incorporate both.

It's only when we demand that we see Jesus and follow Jesus the same way I do and condemn people who don't. That's when we've gone off those tracks. That's when we no longer are simply following but demanding that others follow that same way. We are not called to do that, we are called to point. That's the Lamb of God. That's the God I know. That's the Jesus I know. The incarnate son of God. For me it's all about grace, for me it's all about embracing every person. Good or bad, right or wrong. God's love for them unfailing, God's desire for them unchanging even if they don't get it right. Because none of us do. And I see and understand Vernon's desire for everybody to live according to this law. That if only everybody lived according to this law then we would be a better society. We'd be a better world. And he's right.

We can't get everybody in the first three pews to agree exactly. I'm sorry I didn't mean to pick on you. We can't get the people in last three rows of seats and the people in the last three rows wouldn't agree with the people in the first three rows. But that's okay. We don't have to fully understand and we certainly don't have to demand that people follow the way that we follow or the way that you follow. What is important is that we continue to point. To say this is the God that I know and to invite.

Won't you please come and know this God as well. Won't you know the Son of God this way. And it's always up to the individual to make up their mind. To be led by the Spirit of God in them, to follow the path that makes sense to them. To follow that path that brings them closer to God. And have the humility and the grace to allow others that same freedom, to follow. Not condemning because they don't follow my way but knowing that we are not in the position to know all. That we can only follow as we can and have the grace to allow others to do the same. May we continue to see, to look, to see the people who are pointing to Jesus. Who are speaking the words of grace, and peace, and love, and

following God with all one's heart, mind, soul, and strength. So that we may come to that place where Jesus is calling us to be and allow others to do the same.