

Sermon – John 1: 29-42

Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my salvation. Amen.

Good morning. It's great to be sharing with you this wonderful piece of scripture from the first chapter of John's Gospel. And isn't there a lovely logic to our readings so far during Epiphany? Two weeks ago, with the visit of the Magi, I preached on how Jesus was revealed to all of the world, not just the people of Israel. Last week, we heard about the baptism of Jesus and being in right relationship with God, creation and each other. This week we hear John the Baptist's reflection on Jesus' baptism and the calling of his first disciples. These passages all build on the theme of Jesus' identity as the saviour of the world as well as the challenge for everyone to be called to discipleship.

As I reflected on this passage this week, it seemed not only timely from a church calendar point of view but also for us as a parish. Yesterday a team started the conversations about our Mission for the next three years and developing our Mission Action Plan. And indeed, one of the questions that I asked the group was the same question that Jesus asks in our reading today. "What are you looking for?" What are we as a parish looking for in the next three years? It's a question that we can all ask ourselves isn't it, and, at various times in our lives, it's a question that demands an answer. And it's also been good to reflect on this question, in the context of this passage, as I have prepared for today.

So, what is this reading about? Well, clearly, it's divided into two sections. The first part is a reflection by John the Baptist about the identity of Jesus following his baptism and the second part is about the calling of Jesus' first three disciples. You have probably noticed that the four Gospels are all written in different ways, for different purposes, and the Gospel of John is distinctively different from the other three Gospels. More than the others, this Gospel provides us with a **reflection** on the life and ministry of Jesus.

It points to and articulates the **meaning** behind the events of Jesus' life, his death and his resurrection, and this passage in the first chapter is a great example of John's writing style. Unlike the others, this Gospel does not provide an account of Jesus' baptism, but through the words of John the Baptist, it provides us with a reflection of the significance of his baptism, of him being revealed to the world, and of his identity. It seems that the Gospel writer assumed his audience was already very familiar with the actual events.

John the Baptist plays a big role in chapter 1. You probably remember that he is actually related to Jesus, the child of Elizabeth and Zechariah, conceived miraculously some months before Jesus. Earlier, in verse 6-9 of chapter 1, his ministry is described as follows:

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. ⁹The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

John the Baptist was the person to introduce Jesus and his very special role to the world. He self-described himself, quoting Isaiah, as "the voice crying out in the wilderness". He is the mouthpiece. Let's read verses 29-34 again, which tell us what John said about Jesus.

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.”

Well, there is quite a lot in these few sentences, but today I want to just focus on how John the Baptist describes Jesus to us in three ways:

1. As the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world
2. As the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit, and
3. As the Son of God

Here we are introduced to the concept of the Lamb of God. It’s a concept that was well known in John the Baptist’s day. In a society steeped in the Jewish tradition, people understood the symbolism of the Lamb of God. The Old Testament includes the prophetic reading from Isaiah in chapter 53 that uses the metaphor of the lamb that is led to the slaughter, who bore the sin of many and made intercession for the transgressors. And of course there is the Passover Lamb which is the great Jewish symbol of sacrifice before the Israelites’ exodus out of Egypt. John the Baptist was the son of a priest, so I expect he was well versed in the Old Testament. Calling Jesus the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world was very significant in his day and to his disciples. It spoke right into the Jewish belief that a Messiah or Anointed One would come.

John then follows this up by calling Jesus the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit. He John, was baptizing with water. Only the Messiah would baptize with the Holy Spirit and in this way, John is declaring Jesus as Messiah.

And then in verse 34, he calls Jesus the Son of God. Well, we need to remember from the other Gospels, which describe Jesus’ baptism specifically, that a voice from heaven was heard to say “this is my son”. But in John’s Gospel, we have, as both a reflection and proclamation, John the Baptist declaring Jesus as the Son of God. In typical fashion, John’s

Gospel doesn't just narrate what happens, it reflects on what happened. John the Baptist proclaims Jesus as Son of God.

These few verses are powerful. They not only describe for us, the extraordinary identity of Jesus, they also show us clearly the role of John the Baptist. God instructed him to baptize people so that when it came to Jesus, then John would know who he was and would then be able to testify to that, and furthermore, he would be able to lead others to Jesus, which is what effectively happens next with the call of the first three disciples. Let's take a look at the next section of the Gospel through today's eyes and see what Jesus' call to discipleship means for us. Verses 35-42 say:

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).

So this is interesting. John the Baptist is the one who introduces the first disciples to Jesus. They are in fact his disciples to start with. But they are looking for the Messiah and John is very clear to everyone that he himself is not the Messiah. So they follow Jesus and spend most of the day with him, no doubt listening to what he has to say and getting to know him. They were looking for him, and he was looking for them. And then Andrew,

all fired up, goes off and gets his brother Peter, saying “We have found the Messiah”. Classic disciples making disciples. How many of you were introduced to Jesus through a family member? I know I was, by my beloved Granny.

Andrew brings his brother to Jesus who responds by saying “You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas”.

So, we have an unnamed disciple, we have a renamed disciple and we have Andrew, the one who will in future be overshadowed by his own brother Peter. What does this tell us? I believe it tells us that Jesus wants us all to be his disciples, regardless of our abilities or our identity. Remember in verse 9, John the Baptist describes Jesus as the true light, which enlightens **everyone**.

He calls us all and enlightens us all without favoritism and has a role that is just right for each and every one of us. And as we respond to his call, we too can change, perhaps even our name! Certainly our identity can come under scrutiny as we consider “what we are looking for”. For 20 years I had been Roxanne the Human Resources Manager and then I responded to his call, and I became Roxanne the priest. Over time, my identity was being shaped and changed as well.

This is the challenge. Jesus calls out to us “What are you looking for?” And at different times in our lives we must respond. The three disciples in this story all had different callings and all took different paths in their journeys of discipleship. Peter took on leadership, Andrew kept bringing people to Jesus, a true evangelist. I love Andrew. He brings the Greeks to meet Jesus, he brings the boy with the fish and loves to Jesus. Isn’t that what we have all called to do? Just invite people to meet Jesus and let the Holy Spirit do the rest.

So, how are you responding to his call to discipleship? What is your story? And collectively, what is our story? Perhaps this week, while it is still early

in the new year, it is a good time to consider “What are we looking for?” and “how can I now respond to Jesus’ call?” How is Jesus shaping you and guiding you in your life?”

Let us pray:

Dear Jesus, Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world, have mercy on us in our frailty and our weakness.

Loving Jesus, fill us with the Holy Spirit, so that we may know your calling on us and have the strength and resolve to follow you and invite others to meet you.

Jesus, son of God, Hear our prayer. Amen.