

The Second Sunday of Epiphany

John 1.29-42

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Some of you know that I make wine. Hard to imagine at this time of year, but two barrels worth from last Fall's harvest are resting in my cellar, taking their time to let all the solids drop out of the liquid so the wine can sparkle and it won't pop corks. Winemaking has been a vocation of mine for forty five years. That's almost as long as my other two vocations, ministry and marriage. Of course the Holy Spirit has a hand in all three, and that's good for another sermon.

I am a social winemaker. Not a solitary monk in a dark cave, but I make—or I should say we make—far more than I want every year. So I invite friends, and inquiring people invite themselves, to join in the crush of half a ton of red grapes, or the pressing of that batch. And twice a year for bottling fifty or one hundred gallons of a Sunday afternoon of the finished wine. I might have thirty or forty people of all ages for a bottling, and kids just love agriculture (without drinking).

If they wish, a person or family puts cash on the barrelhead and becomes a member, entitled to take home what we bottle. And here is where it gets interesting. I don't recruit really, I enjoy how many people learn how wine is made and find out that they enjoy more varieties than they thought they

did. I enjoy how people meet each other and after a couple times know what they like to do best on the bottling line and do it. If I'm at someone's house and they pour some of my wine for the party and somebody asks me incredulously, "You made this wine??" I respond to them pretty modestly, but if they are curiouser and curiouser, I take their address and tell them I will let them know of our next bottling. No hard sell, they can COME AND SEE.

Yup, that's where I've been going with this tale. Long ago my daughter told me "Dad, you should run the church like you do your wine co-op." I took her advice very seriously.

Consider these three words of Jesus as evangelism, and how intriguing it is. Jesus takes two men home with the words, and just ahead Philip will beguile Nathaniel with the same words. COME AND SEE.

Do we expect Jesus to demand they come to him? Maybe we are used to the Holy Spirit having to hit St. Paul and others over the head with a two-by-four to get recognition, that this easy-does-it method surprises us. For one thing, it assumes incarnation, God present not only in Jesus, but with us, too-- God in us, God among us all along.

When Jesus takes those two disciples into his house, what do you suppose happens? I have no doubt that Jesus helps them find themselves in their curious state already being called to a new vocation. not to be super salesmen for the Kingdom of God company—he has asked them "What are you looking

for?” “What is your life crying out for?”--but helping them realize that God is already doing something in their lives through their curiosity, that the Spirit is already piquing their minds and opening their hearts to a new way of being in the world. Incarnation. God’s Spirit fills Jesus, says John the Baptist, and yet also those who COME AND SEE why they are so pulled to Jesus’ person and later to his purpose.

“What are you looking for?”

That’s an evangelism question. How are we doing at posing that question in its depth to, say, people visiting New Song with their spiritual curiosity? “I like liturgy,” and “I’m hoping for a community of faith,” and “Needs to be a good sermon>” OK, these may be very true, and yet What are you looking for within all that? The church growth experts tell us that someone new to a congregation is within six months fore or aft of a major crisis or life change. The Spirit is already bubbling up in a person when they make their way here, we don’t have to do that, the incarnation seems to be working.. Can we help them name the movement as, “God beginning a work in me?”

One New Testament scholar, remembering the wrist bracelets with the letters WWJD (what would Jesus do), made the point that we would be much better off having one with WWJBD— What Would John the Baptist Do? In this passage John points to where God has become manifest and says “there he is,” even sends his own grad students that way. John also

recognizes one of the qualities of divinity in Jesus—this is the Lamb of God.

What does Lamb of God conjure up for you? A cute little pet lambyins trailing behind? Try again. Think of the first Passover. Each household slaughtering a sheep for a quick, strengthening meal before a long flight, and sheep's blood smeared on the doorpost so the angel would pass over. We are talking about sacrifice for the common good, common survival, common liberation.

How often do we hear the refrain, “Why can't the all-powerful God do something about this?” “If God is so powerful, why doesn't He (it's always He) act to save these people?” What if the assumption is wrong?

In Jesus God has chosen a different way and John realizes it. There are a lot of images of kingship and royalty and power in the psalms and elsewhere in the Old Testament, of God coming over the mountains with lightning and thunder to blow someone away. This Gospel has none of that. Instead we get a lamb, weak, vulnerable, and not the Passover image of Charlton Heston as Moses waving God on to his next Exodus miracle, but the Passover lamb slaughtered the night before with its protective blood still on the doorposts of the abandoned Egyptian huts.

Greg Garrett, a sometime faculty member of one of our Episcopal seminaries, put it this way:

“...the startling image of the Messiah as lamb radically rejects earlier Biblical images of royal majesty, and that in choosing this metaphor God (through Jesus) is choosing weakness and electing to play the role not of the Powerful Passover Deliverer but of the sacrificial Passover lamb.”

What are you looking for? Probably not the lamb if you feel yourself threatened and in dire straits. But COME AND SEE. I'll bet at least half the people here came looking for a lion to save them, were disappointed in the lack of Godly muscle and fireworks, and yet found a different sort of power for their lives with the lamb.

Many of you have thus been led to sacrificial living in some way, a new vocation that gives back what you have been given by the Lamb. We may not have known that is what we were looking for, but in coming and seeing we have stayed where Jesus lives.

Lord let your Epiphany star shine within us and among us, that your people may manifest your liberating power and love to the whole world, now and in the days to come.

