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1 Corinthians 1:1-9

1:1 Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes,
1:2 To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours:
1:3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
1:4 I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus,
1:5 for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind
1:6 just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you
1:7 so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ.
1:8 He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.
1:9 God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

John 1:29-42

1:29 The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!
1:30 This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'
1:31 I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel."
1:32 And John testified, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him.
1:33 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.'
1:34 And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God."
1:35 The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples,
1:36 and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!"
1:37 The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus.
1:38 When 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?"
1:39 He 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.
1:40 One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother.
1:41 He first found his brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated Anointed).

1:42 He 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).

Proclamation of the Word

This past week many of us have seen lots of Fanfare that goes along with a National Championship Football game. There are pregame press conferences, interviews with the players, a grand entrance. We've seen pageantry, parades, and pizza parties. And after the win around here, the t-shirts went to press, the staff went to work on planning a homecoming welcome and a Saturday parade. All week I have thought of those of you here who had to pull all of that together who never get to be in the spotlight, but make it all work. Although, I did see Robin Denny on the news. Well-done. Think of all the fanfare we have seen just this week.

If you are not a sports fan, maybe you watched the Golden Globe awards Sunday night.ⁱ No other industry has as many productions and awards programs as the entertainment industry, except maybe Sports. There are the Emmys, the Grammys, the Oscars, the MTV music awards, the Tonys, and the list goes on. You are probably familiar with what goes on before the actual ceremony begins. They literally roll out the red carpet. Velvet ropes cordon off the walkway leading to the entrance, and sometimes a few tiers of bleachers are erected for spectators. Hours, and sometimes even days, before the show begins, crowds gather hoping to catch a glimpse of the stars. Then, as the limos begin pulling up and depositing their precious celebrity cargo, cheers and screams emanate from the spectators as the likes of Emma Stone, Viola Davis, or the Ryans- Ryan Gosling or Ryan Reynolds, arrive. They walk down the red carpet with microphones shoved in their faces as eager reporters question them on "Who" they are wearing.

It's amazing how much energy and excitement happens when the right person walks in front of you. Which is interesting considering what happens with Jesus in the passage we just read. By contrast, there is no fanfare. Apparently Jesus is no Annette Benning or Denzel Washington or even a Deshaun. In fact, John even says, he would not recognize who Jesus was if not for the Spirit in the form of a dove descending from

the sky at Jesus' baptism. Without some extra divine help it would be hard to pick Jesus out of the crowd. Which is why this is so fascinatingly understated. While everyone is clamoring for the celebrities' autographs, they would miss Jesus even if he were to brush up against them.

Even Jesus' name "Lamb of God" would not make a headline or a tweet. We talk about someone being a pig, or eating like a cow, or strong as a lion, but almost never would we call anyone a Lamb. He's a real lamb of a guy. A lamb is weak, small, gentle. We say fight like a tiger not lead like a Lamb. What an odd name to call someone.

Yet, God's own Son is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. John could have just yelled, "Dead man walking." That is what his audience would have heard when Jesus was called a lamb. A lamb was sacrificed daily at the Temple in worship. And remember when God was about to free his Hebrew children from Egypt, God instructed them to sacrifice a lamb, then to brush its' blood on the doorposts or lintels of their houses. And when the angel of Death struck that night, he would pass over those houses and kill only the first-born sons of the Egyptians. This is why the Jews including Jesus celebrate the Passover, which we have included into our Maundy Thursday observance. The night before Jesus is crucified upon a cross, Jesus is celebrating the Passover meal. The Last Supper is our sacrament.

Lamb of God=Dead Man walking. Like Dylan Roof, he has received a death sentence. But Jesus has done no wrong. Nice guys and lambs finish last, right?

God is doing a new thing. This Lamb will take away the sins of the world. For us, for his children, there will be a new Exodus- deliverance and freedom to walk in trust with God. Jesus will be the bridge to join us to God, to reconcile us, lead us to God.

Even so, isn't it strange that Jesus' debut would happen like this.

John has to point him out to the other three: Simon Peter, Andrew and the other guy. Somehow they recognize Jesus' importance right away asking to go with him- even without the entourage or spotlight on him. Something must have drawn them to Jesus, a light within perhaps. That and the witness of their friend John. When they got close to Jesus they wanted to be with him. They wanted to learn from him. "Rabbi" they called him. When they asked where he was staying, Jesus invites them, "Come and See."

Evangelism- calling disciples to come and follow. It is just that simple and just that hard.

The big scary word Evangelism looks like this. John pointed Jesus out to his friends. He "witnessed" in that way. And when Simon Peter, Andrew, and the other guy asked, Jesus simply invited them to spend time with him. Not much fanfare. No awards, no spotlights, and no show. Simply Jesus being himself.

Evangelism is telling others what God is doing in your life and in the world. We don't usually have those conversations with total strangers. A friend invites another friend to come spend time together. And as we spend time together God works and the Spirit moves among us in our conversations. God works and the Spirit moves in the ways we learn to care for one another, and then care for others that Jesus cares for.

This week I was sitting around talking with some folks from Rotary over lunch. I discovered that a few of the folks show up regularly at a local eating establishment. Someone said, "It's like Cheers, where

everybody knows your name." There are the regulars- a pretty eclectic, diverse group as they described themselves: the CPA, the Vet, the Insurance agent, the political science professor. One woman said that one regular patrons became ill and died. The place shut down, as all the regulars rallied the troops. The restaurant gathered ice, paper products, food, and ministered to the family. A plaque now adorns the bar stool where she always sat. It was a privilege to join them for lunch one day this week. And this small town girl loved being there. It reminded me of the Dress shop where I worked every Saturday on Main St. As a teenager I learned from those who worked there... and the regulars like Mrs. Evelyn who came by every week whether she was buying anything or not. I think she bought and returned the same pants just to have a reason to come by. We were her "Cheers"- where everybody knew her name, her story, and her clothing size.

And then it hit me. That is church. People spending time together. Learning to love one another. Coming together in times of need. And being inspired to serve, not because they all think the same, or look the same, but because they know they have a need, a hunger. Because in our hearts most of us are most hungry for love. The love of God is shown to us in a relationship. That is what Church is- a relationship with God and one another. And that relationship compels us to be a part of God's mission. Walking with Jesus, sharing life with him, will lead you out into the world to be a part of what God is already doing.

And when you walk beside Jesus, you will be changed. Your priorities change. Being a citizen of the Kingdom of God is first priority. You work for kingdom values. You love and serve as Jesus served- sacrificially, mercifully, generously, openly, and without regard for what anyone thinks, but for what God desires. Today is the birthday of one preacher who shared this message, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and we still have work to do.

So how do you find Jesus when he blends into the crowd? You have to be looking for him. Maybe even hungry for God... like folks drawn to their favorite lunch counter in town. Just like Jesus that day, these three amigos might have just missed Jesus. He was just a face in the crowd, no red carpet, no fanfare. Someone had to point him out to them like John did. They were invited by Jesus to spend time together. And Jesus called them to come with him and see what God was doing. Keep your eyes open for Jesus out there.

There are plenty of shiny, exciting, alluring things calling for our attention. The lure of celebrity, of over-work, of wealth, of over-commitment and busyness, are the ways of drawing our eyes off of Jesus. I read a study that said the biggest challenge today in Youth Ministry- of helping Kids connect with God and the community of faith and grow in service to the world comes down to one thing- Busyness. And where do these young people learn to be so busy, even too busy for God and their faith? I admit, as a parent, my kids learned to be busy from me. But I also learned a long time ago that Chuck and I could not teach my children about God and following Jesus alone. We need your help. We need our kids to spend time with you, to watch you, and to learn from you as you follow Jesus.

And we could not be more grateful for you, for our church. You are the Johns, the Peters, the Andrews- pointing the way and coming alongside them. Gratitude for you and his own youth leaders is one reason Chuck serves as a Mid High youth advisor. Kids need lots of people besides their own parents to teach them, lead them, and love them in the path of faith and life.

The Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world invites us to come, to walk with him and trust him, to enjoy a relationship with him. Jesus says, "Come and see."

And our eyes are truly open to see what is most important in the Kingdom of God- there will be little fanfare, but a great blessing.

But we have to keep our eyes open to see him...and he might just look like the neighbor in need, the brother in trouble, the sister who you would never imagine befriending.

Benediction

Jesus says, Come on. Let's go.

He bids us go out of these doors, and look for him, to seek him.

He bids us to love our neighbors, especially the ones we would never notice.

Keep your eyes open and your heart, too.

Join him in his kingdom mission, and you will be changed...for the better.

Now may the love of God, the grace of our Lord Jesus, and the communion of the Holy Spirit keep you forever.

ⁱ illustration taken from Scott Hoezee, "The Lectionary Gospel, Epiphany 2A" January 9, 2017 at cep.calvinseminary.edu