

**January 19, 2020 – A New Humanity**

**Given by Rev. Mattei**

Today, we read about the baptism of our Lord from the perspective of the gospel of John (we read about it from the gospel of Matthew last week). It’s an important enough event, a starting point in Jesus’ ministry, that all four gospels report about it. In John’s version, John the baptizer understands his own mission as revelatory of the one “who ranks ahead of [him] because he is before [him].” (John 1:30) He identifies the Son of God as the Lamb of God. In that title, we see John’s understanding of Jesus’ mission: the Word made flesh (John 1:14) is the *Lamb* of God that *takes away* the *sin* of the *world*! That bold statement reveals to the world God’s plan in Jesus. Theologians say that sin means alienation, not belonging, estrangement, disconnection, and discombobulation. It is a separation from God, from others, and from self. Jesus comes to reconcile and to remove that separation from the cosmos. He comes to reveal the Father as the One in whom we must dwell (John 14:20; 15:4; 17:23). His mission is to bring healing and wholeness to the world. The rest of the gospel of John will explain what the Lamb of God looks and sounds like, what he does and what he signifies. In John’s mind, Jesus the Lamb is at the center of the new Passover meal to be consumed for the true liberation of humanity (Ex. 12).

There is a ripple effect when John witnesses to the Lamb. John tells everyone about the Messiah, then his disciple Andrew tells his brother Simon, and the news will eventually reach others, including Philip and Nathanael. A network is slowly being built based on relationships. The disciples’ engaging outburst of enthusiasm generates from Jesus’ initial question: “what are you looking for?” (Jn. 1:38). A better translation is "What are you seeking?" It is a question worth wrestling with: What are you seeking? What motivates you? What is that you really need, not just on the surface, but deep down into the core of your being? That question, ”What are you looking for? or, by now better, “Whom are you looking for?” will be asked again in the garden at the time of the resurrection (John 20:15).

The disciples answer with another question: “Where are you staying?” I don’t think they are interested in the kind of accommodation Jesus has found in the desert, whether he is with friends or family, has found a room at a nearby inn or has pitched a tent. In fact, the word “staying” also means “abiding, remaining.” The disciples want to know about the enduring, permanent, eternal, undying dwelling place of this Lamb of God. Where are you staying? Where can we find you? Where shall we go to be with you, to receive what you have to offer? Where can we be in the very presence of God? Where is the true Temple of God? Where can we worship in Spirit and in Truth? The abiding, the dwelling in Jesus will require an active and disciplined engagement: “come and see.” Jesus welcomes this kind of inquiry. In fact, this is what he recommends later on to his disciples, an enduring relationship (John 15:4; 8:31).

“Stuff” cannot satisfy our hunger for love, well-being and a sense of completeness, of enough-ness. We cannot find our true self apart from God. Without God, there is no wholeness. Apart from God, there is emptiness, dissatisfaction, dis-ease. This disconnection from God and from our true self produces the anxiety that flows into greed, competitivity, aggressiveness, lust, judgment, self-righteousness, blame, guilt, and shame. These negative behaviors are part of the sin of separation, the gap between God and us that Jesus has come to fill. In him the gap gets closed and we are once again reconciled to God, to ourselves and to one another. Unity at last.

This is after all at the heart of Dr. Martin Luther King’s dream, in which the children of slaves and slave owners “sit down together at the table of brotherhood” and “little black boys and little black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and little white girls as sisters and brothers.” (I Have a Dream, 1963). Disciples of Jesus work for the removal of all the barriers that we put between one another, all those barriers that reinforce separation, the sin of the world. When we in baptism “renounce evil” we, in other words, renounce behaviors and attitudes that push us apart, set one against the other, numb us to the suffering of separation, cover up our despair, disengage us from our true self, and make us lose our humanity.

Only by coming and seeing Jesus, the Word made flesh, the Lamb of God that takes away our sin, can we know love, experience God’s glory, become “one new humanity” and a “dwelling place for God” (Ephesians 2:15.22)

What will you do to get closer to Jesus this week? Whom will you forgive as part of the reconciling work of Jesus? Whom will you tell of your life-changing experience of Jesus? Write a letter of appreciation to someone to whom you are close. Include as many words, phrases, “inside jokes” and meaningful references in your relationship as you can. This week may you become curious about the Word incarnate, the Lamb of God, who bids you: “come and see.” May you enjoy the new humanity built on Christ. Amen.