



## **Which Christ Do You Follow? Isaiah 49:1-7; Psalm 40:1-11; John 1:29-42 Reverend Giuseppe Mattei (January 15, 2023)**

The invitation to a party, a concert, a club is rather common. Perhaps, you might have been invited to come and check out a community, a new restaurant, or a doctor's facility. Have you ever been invited to a church service? Have you invited someone to join you for service? Would you? Why or why not? Who invited you to check Jesus out and follow him? And what happened next? What did you learn from Jesus? What did he ask of you? Was it hard? Is it still happening?

As a teenager, I learned a lot about his ultimate plan for the world and God's invitation to be part of that plan. I had to adjust; I learned humility; I learned patience and compassion. I learned about the demands of love, of forgiveness, of praying for my enemy. I am still learning. I still encounter mercy as I make mistakes and resist the Spirit's whisper. I am in awe that Jesus would want me still to follow him, to be part of God's great project for the world. At times, I get tired and discouraged. That's when I find rest in his arms.

After Jesus' baptism, John sees Jesus walking by and makes a rather weird announcement to his disciples, "Look, the lamb of God." The men wonder about this proclamation. They were probably aware of the Jewish tradition. In the Old Testament, lambs were one of the common animals of sacrifice used by the Israelites to offer to the living God.<sup>1</sup>

A lamb was seen as a symbol of innocence and meekness. Any lamb that was to be sacrificed needed to be pure, spotless, and without any blemishes. This sacrificial requirement links back to the Israelites' liberation from their enslavement in Egypt.<sup>2</sup>

From a salvific symbol we move to a salvific personification. According to Isaiah, the Suffering Servant of Yahweh is described as a lamb being prepared for the slaughter.<sup>3</sup>

So, hearing John's strange statement, the disciples follow Jesus. Jesus notices them and asks, "What do you want?" The disciples offer their own awkward answer with another question. "Rabbi, where are you staying?" The disciples are not just curious about where Jesus is living or sleeping. They want to know who he is and what he is about.

Jesus' reply is quick, "Come and see." In John the Evangelist's mind, to see is to acquire deep knowledge. It means to look beyond what you are seeing to gain a deeper understanding of reality. We may translate that with "Come and learn from me." Or "Come and live life with me

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<sup>1</sup> Other animals, such as goats, rams, doves, and bulls, were also used in various sacrifices. See Exodus 29:38-42.

<sup>2</sup> Exodus 12

<sup>3</sup> Isaiah 53 especially v. 7. This passage is referred to by the early Church. See Acts 8:32; 1 Cor 5:7; 1 Peter 1:18-21; repeatedly in Rev 5, 7, 12, 21, and 22.

at the center.” Jesus invites people to be his disciples, to follow him closely, and to help him bring about a new way of being and relating to one another. He calls that God’s Kingdom.

Jesus can’t (won’t) bring about God’s Kingdom, God’s Rule without you and me. He didn’t two thousand years ago and won’t today. God’s Kingdom’s realization requires the disciples’ participation. The call is to follow in Jesus’ footsteps, and this will take us not only where he is but also to follow his example of total assimilation with those who suffer. We won’t need to become houseless as he was.<sup>4</sup> We need to expand our kindness capacity and recognize him in those at the margins of society: the hungry, the prisoner, the sick, the abused, the terrorized.<sup>5</sup>

Love calls us to overcome our resistance to compassion. God is best known in love. We know God as we love God’s people. Jesus’ heart is huge and makes room for all. Are we willing to follow *this* Jesus? Faith is action, a participatory action. He did not do it all for us, rather we are invited to do, live, resist, gather, love, act like he did. For Kingdom’s sake. For our sake.

“The Christian community, therefore, is that community that freely becomes oppressed, because they know that Jesus himself has defined humanity's liberation in the context of what happens to the little ones. Christians join the cause of the oppressed in the fight for justice not because of some philosophical principle of "the Good" or because of a religious feeling of sympathy for people in prison. Sympathy does not change the structures of injustice. The authentic identity of Christians with the poor is found in the claim which the Jesus-encounter lays upon their own life-style, a claim that connects the word "Christian" with the liberation of the poor. Christians fight not for humanity in general but for themselves and out of their love for concrete human beings.”<sup>6</sup>

How might our life be different if we picked up his invitation to “Come and see.”? How would we walk with Jesus and care for the world? Would Martin Luther King’s life and death, just like the life and death of many other saints in history, be a testimony of consequential impact to our life lived with Jesus at the center?

Whether we have answered the call to come and see long time ago or it’s a new thing for us today, may we keep the curiosity to “come and see” alive. May we grow closer to Jesus and experience the joy of the Kingdom. Amen.

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<sup>4</sup> Jesus replied, "Foxes have dens and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay His head." (Matthew 8:20)

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 25:34-36

<sup>6</sup> James H. Cone, God of the Oppressed