

The Second Sunday After the Epiphany, A 2008  
The Rev. Ronald N. Johnson

John the Baptist said, “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” This proclamation says it all. God’s Son is in the world in the person of Jesus Christ. God has fulfilled his promise; now is the time for recognition. This is the message that John the Baptist proclaimed. John had been working to prepare God’s people for their messiah, urging them to repent and make a straight path in their hearts for the Lord. Now John saw Jesus, and baptized Jesus at the Lord’s request. When he brought Jesus up from the water, John witnessed that magnificent theophany, when the Spirit of God descended upon Jesus and God the Father spoke: “This is my Son.” With our Lord’s baptism, John’s work was done; he had fulfilled his mission. Now, he could announce the good news that Jesus Christ had come.

John the Baptist was a contemporary of Jesus, according to the biblical witness, he was a relative of Jesus, and he was a very charismatic prophet, a very powerful preacher. Hundreds came to hear John preach, and those who heard and responded to John’s call prepared themselves by baptism as a symbolic act of their preparation to receive God’s Son. John had a tremendous following, and many disciples. But now, his work was done. John proclaimed to the world that the Lamb of God had come.

There is much, here, and the phrase “Lamb of God” is loaded with meaning, meaning understood only in the context of Good Friday and Easter Day. If you read the rest of John’s Gospel, he will take you from this observation that Jesus is the Lamb of God to the realization that God’s lamb is the Paschal lamb, the sacrificial Passover lamb that God received as the perfect and eternal offering of atonement on Good Friday. Through our Lord’s offering of himself as a sacrifice to God the Father, we are made “one with God,” or reconciled to God, because God sets aside our sin.

Today our Gospel reading, from the Evangelist John’s account of Jesus’ life, tells us that because of John the Baptist’s proclamation, a number of his own disciples left John to follow Jesus. We are witnesses, through John, to the beginning of our Lord’s redemptive work. His first order of business was to gather those who would help build the Kingdom of God. Among the first to follow Jesus was Andrew, a fisherman, who immediately brought his brother, Peter, to Jesus. These two brothers, together with another pair of brothers, James and John, became our Lord’s closest friends and were his inner circle. This was the beginning of the Christian Church.

We can learn from this passage. It should and can speak directly to us. When we identify Jesus as the Messiah, when that recognition happens for us, then we have a choice to make. We can say “Yes, you are God’s Son,” and do nothing; or we can put down those things that hold us back and step forward as a disciple of the Master. It is our choice; it can be no one else’s. We can follow in the footsteps of Andrew and Peter, or we can go our separate way, but a separate way is not God’s way.

To know Jesus is to follow Jesus by being a disciple. To be a disciple is to study and learn at the Master's feet. To be a disciple is to do the Master's work and the work our Master has given us, as an obligation of discipleship, is to know Jesus Christ and make him known in this troubled and frightened world. It is an essential task, not an easy task.

There is a cost to discipleship. Our Lord paid with his life so that we could be ransomed from sin, and he told us that if we are to be his disciples then we, too, must take up the cross. We will find as we follow Jesus, that we must be willing to put aside whatever might keep us from full commitment. Often the sacrifices will be inconsequential, things that we did not need to cling to to begin with. From time to time, we will face a major decision. Do we let something truly dear go in order to follow the Lord? It is in those moments that we realize that we are carrying our cross. But always, we can walk in the certain faith and knowledge that our Lord is bearing his Cross right along with us, and he will be at our side until we rest in God's own home. *Amen.*