

## SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (A)

*Second Sunday after the Epiphany*

John 1:29-42

January 20, 2008

*The Rev. Peter C. Jacobson, STS*

Gloria Dei Lutheran Church

Wichita, Kansas

In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Last Sunday we celebrated the Baptism of Our Lord, and in the Gospel, we heard proclaimed that at Jesus' baptism, a voice from heaven rang out, and announced, "*This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.*"

The Sunday before that, we celebrated the Epiphany of Our Lord, and in the Gospel, we heard proclaimed how God miraculously used a star to guide the wise men to the Christ-child.

The Sunday before that, in the Gospel, we heard proclaimed how an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and warned him to flee with Mary and Jesus into Egypt, so that King Herod would not be able to kill the child.

Five days before that on Christmas Eve, we celebrated the Nativity of Our Lord, and in the Gospel, we heard proclaimed how God sent his angel to announce the birth of the Messiah to the shepherds.

For several weeks now, the Gospel has proclaimed very specific instances, of *God breaking into human lives* in a supernatural way, to make some kind of announcement, or to direct someone's actions.

But today his is *different*. Instead of focusing on some *divine* action, or *supernatural* event, today's Gospel contains a series of *human* actions. Today the revelation of Jesus' identity hangs *not* on a voice from heaven, *not* on a message from God, *not* on an angel, but rather on the testimony of a *man*, John the Baptist, and those who follow him. Rather than a direct revelation from heaven — as in the weeks past, the emphasis today shifts to the *human* testimony, faith, and discipleship, through which Jesus is *proclaimed*, and made known to the world.

At this point in St. John's Gospel, Jesus hasn't yet performed any miracles. He hasn't yet done any preaching or teaching, or begun his ministry. But Jesus' true identity has been revealed to John the Baptist, and John begins to publicly tell others about Jesus.

And what a testimony he gives! "*Here is the **Lamb of God** who takes away the sin of the world.*" Here is the one on whom I saw the *Spirit descend* like a dove. Here is the one who will *baptize* with the Holy Spirit. Here is the *Son of God*.

And this revelation of Jesus' identity relies not on some definitive thundering voice from heaven, not on an angel, but on John's *fragile* and *vulnerable* human voice. And that is the way it is, in witnessing to Jesus. It is always a *risky* venture, which can offer no "proofs" beyond what the witness has seen, heard, and

experienced. All one can do, is invite others to accept the proclamation.

Not surprisingly, John's own disciples, those who already *know him* and *trust him*, are the first ones to follow Jesus. And when Jesus notices two of the Baptist's disciples following him, he asks them — and us — “*What are you looking for?*” And those early disciples respond by asking a question, “*Rabbi, where are you staying?*”

Now, one might have expected a more profound response, like “*We're seeking the meaning of life*” or “*We're trying to understand what God is doing in the world.*” Those would seem deeper, and more worthy responses to Jesus' question. But again, they simply ask, “*Where are you staying?*”

These first disciples are not looking for answers to abstract theological questions, or academic speculations. No. They are seeking the *Messiah*. They are seeking to *be with God*. And so they are seeking God's Son, Jesus — seeking to *be with him*, to *know him*, and to *follow him*. And so they need to know where he is staying. That's the most important thing.

Jesus responds to their question with the straightforward invitation: “*Come and see.*” On the surface he is simply inviting these seekers to come with him, and see where he is staying. But at a deeper level, he is calling them to be his disciples.

“*Come and see.*” When many of us think of discipleship, we may think that first we must *believe* in Jesus and *know* who he is — that is, *see* him, before we can *follow* — or come. But here that order is reversed. Jesus invites us to *first come*, and then *later see*.

*First we follow Jesus* along the path of discipleship, *first* we spend time with him, and then along the way, we will come more fully to *understand* and *see* who he is. Only *after* following him, only then can one come to truly *know* him and *believe* in him.

So these first disciples do as Jesus says. They go where he is staying and they remain with him. And they discover that his words, “*Come and see*” — are not just an invitation, but are truly a *promise*. For while the disciples are with Jesus, something happens to them. They do indeed begin to “*see.*”

And the next thing we know, these new disciples continue where John the Baptist left off, and they themselves become bold witnesses for Jesus. John told them about Jesus, and now they go and *tell others*. One of them, Andrew, immediately goes to his brother, Simon, and says, “*We have found the Messiah.*”

And that is the way it has continued to go, down through the life of the Church, to this day. The church is a community of people that have first been invited to come and see Jesus. And then those same people are called and sent to *bear witness* to Jesus. You and I — the Church today — it is *our calling* to now invite others to *come and see*.

God has given to the Church this task to make Jesus known in the world.

We're not given logical presuppositions and arguments *to prove* who Jesus is. We're not given supernatural powers to *dazzle* people and so *demonstrate* who Jesus is.

Rather, just as God depended on John the Baptist to use simple human speech to bear witness to Jesus, and just as God depended on that first group of disciples to go and testify to who Jesus was, just so, God depends on the Church to make Jesus known in the world today, using humble human speech and actions, using simple things like bread and wine, water and the Word. God is calling on, God is depending on, *you* and *me*, to point others to Jesus. He is relying on us to invite them to "come and see."

A while back, I read an interesting newspaper opinion piece, written by a self-professed agnostic, who moved to the Midwest a few years ago from Los Angeles. The author wrote that in his cultural circle, there were no religiously devout people. Indeed, when his friends learned that he was moving to the Midwest, they tried to dissuade him, telling him that he just didn't belong in the "Bible Belt." And he admitted that he was frightened by the prospect of — as he put it — "*living among so many real Christians.*" But his experience with one neighbor changed his perspective. Here is a portion of what he wrote:

*[A]s my wife and I unloaded the last boxes off the moving van...our new...neighbors arrived with trays of cookies, houseplants, and invitations to church. The friendliness pleased us; the thought of going to church did not. But one neighbor's determination impressed us enough to attend a single service. We actually enjoyed it and found the sense of community compelling.*

*But conversion remained unlikely, and neighborhood relations cooled as our family's lack of faith became evident. Seeing that we wouldn't give church a second chance, the persevering neighbor that got us to go in the first place invited me to go jogging instead. I agreed, but warned him that any attempts at my salvation would ultimately fail. "I'll leave that up to God," he said. "Sounds fair," I replied, and the next day our routine began at 6:00 AM.*

*Three days a week, we ran and talked. Most of our conversations centered on family life, work, and sometimes religion. He never preached, I never argued.*

*Slowly, I began to know my would-be savior as a friend and to understand his Christian perspective. Perhaps because his faith remained strong and deeply integrated into his life, he never found*

*my skepticism threatening. We spoke freely...*

*I watched him get through times of sickness and financial adversity; his forehead didn't wrinkle. He trusted God. In prayer, he looked for the lesson in his situation without anguishing the future. My method for handling life's downers includes lawyers and insomnia. I trust myself and that's not always reassuring. In contrast, I don't think my neighbor ever missed a good night's sleep...*

And then the author goes on to say that although he hasn't come to faith, he has a much different view of Christians than he did before. And he hints that he is now at least open to the possibility of faith.

Now on the one hand, I suppose that some might say that his Christian neighbor's witness has failed. Because the man is still not a Christian, still not a disciple of Jesus, still not a member of the Church.

But perhaps the seeds sown by that neighbor will yet one day bear fruit. Maybe the next time someone invites this man to "Come and See," he will respond, and the Spirit will work the miracle of faith. Or if not, then maybe it will happen with the next invitation. Or the next. Or the next.

We don't know, and we must trust the results to the Holy Spirit — who is finally the source of all faith. But the Holy Spirit calls people to faith through means — through people who speak God's gracious words of invitation, "Come and see, Jesus."

In the power of the Holy Spirit, which God breathed upon you in your baptism, I charge you to go and offer your own fragile and vulnerable testimony to Jesus. A testimony backed up, only by the promise of God. But that promise is enough.

In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.