

## Come and see

John 1: 29-39

[Augsburg University Chapel, 29 January 2020, as part of the “Sticking with love” series]

John 1:29-42 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

### *The Lamb of God*

<sup>29</sup> 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! <sup>30</sup> This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.’ <sup>31</sup> I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel.” <sup>32</sup> And John testified, “I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. <sup>33</sup> 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.’ <sup>34</sup> And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God.”<sup>[a]</sup>

<sup>35</sup> The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, <sup>36</sup> and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, “Look, here is the Lamb of God!” <sup>37</sup> The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. <sup>38</sup> 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?” <sup>39</sup> 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.

It was about 4 o’clock in the afternoon...what is that about? Why does the gospel author think it is important to include such mundane details in this story? I want to suggest that it is important to see such details not as extraneous to the story but as an illustration that this epiphany – this revealing of Jesus to the world – does not occur in some sort of mystical, superordinary way, but in the mundane moments of time and space. And further, that the abiding revealing of Jesus to the world in our own moments of time and space is found in the ordinary, even mundane, aspects of our lives together. In other words, there are John the Baptists all around, pointing the way ahead, calling us as did Dr. King – surely a John the Baptist in our time - to stick with love.

It is about 10:45 in the morning...

I have my own story of an experience while I was an undergraduate at Luther College that I often share with Augsburg students when talking about how we may discern our callings in unusual ways. I was about halfway through my time at Luther College – and I was on a track to become a Lutheran pastor – such was the path ordained for the eldest child of a Lutheran pastor in those days. But I was having doubts. I went to a religion professor from whom I was taking a class and I told him about my doubts, telling him that I wasn’t sure I was cut out to live my Dad’s life, that I doubted if I had the skills to be a good pastor. And his response in that moment changed my life. He said that he understood my concerns but that he also knew that I loved the questions that arose out of the faith tradition and community. He said there were these places called divinity schools where you went to study religion, not necessarily prepare to

become a pastor. Here was my John the Baptist, pointing the way. And the rest is history. A five minute conversation in the hallway. Let's say it was 11:15 in the morning.

What I love about John's gospel account of Jesus's early ministry is the way in which we see the hand-off from John to Jesus in the daily discourse of their lives together. First, we see John retelling the story of how he baptized Jesus in the waters of the River Jordan and how, not recognizing that this was the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, he was amazed by the Spirit descending on Jesus, proclaiming that it is He who will baptize with the Holy Spirit. Here was John, living out his calling to point to the One who was to come, not knowing exactly if or when he might find success – and then this happens.

What I want to focus on, though, is not that John is somehow successful in his mission, but that he had the faith and courage and resolve to continue to pursue that calling, not knowing where it might lead. He is forming a community of disciples with the promise that "a man who ranks ahead of me" will come to take away the sins of the world. John is sticking with love even when there is little evidence that his mission is on course.

And then there is the moment when Jesus walks by John and two of his disciples, and John points to the light, to Jesus, the Lamb of God – and here the hand-off occurs as the two disciples turn to follow Jesus. John has formed his disciples for this moment. He has prepared them to follow. He has equipped them to become disciples of the One who has come to take away the sin of the world.

The next exchange between Jesus and the two disciples strikes me as a bit humorous – showing how much the disciples still have to learn. Jesus turns and sees these two straggler disciples, trailing behind, and asks them this profound question, "What are you looking for?" to which they offer this rather naïve response, "Where are you staying?" as if this was all about accommodations and sleeping arrangements. But Jesus does not shame or indict them – he knows they have much to learn as he invites them to "Come and see." Jesus is sticking with love. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon.

And in the days ahead these first disciples will learn the lessons of their lives – lessons about healing and feeding multitudes, lessons about betrayal and forgiveness, lessons about crucifixion and empty tombs – lessons about being public people of faith, sticking with love in the daily, ordinary moments of their lives.

Where were you when someone asked you what you were looking for? What time was it when you went looking for something, perhaps not knowing at all what path lay ahead, and yet someone invited you to "Come and see"? As Kristina Fruge challenged us in yesterday's chapel, "Are we paying attention, minding the gaps, confessing our sin, being brave and humble?" Are we sticking with love?

I think this story of John and Jesus points to important aspects of the work we do together in this university, especially as an institution guided by the faith and values of the Lutheran Christian church. At Augsburg, we believe that it is our calling to form, educate and equip our students so that they can follow the light wherever it leads them. At Augsburg, we expect that our students will continue to ask questions – sometimes naïve questions, often profound

questions – as they grow in their understanding of the journey they have embarked upon. At Augsburg, we know there comes a moment when we let our students go, release them to follow other teachers and guides and dreams. At Augsburg, we stick with love, because love is at the core of the education and experience we aspire to offer each other. As a member of our Board of Regents recently commented, “At Augsburg we love our students (and each other) so that they might learn to love themselves.” And that love happens each and every day, in spaces and places across the campus and beyond, in ordinary and mundane moments and exchanges.

## **Wild Geese**

Mary Oliver

You do not have to be good.  
You do not have to walk on your knees  
for a hundred miles through the desert repenting.  
You only have to let the soft animal of your body  
love what it loves.  
Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.  
Meanwhile the world goes on.  
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain  
are moving across the landscapes,  
over the prairies and the deep trees,  
the mountains and the rivers.  
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,  
are heading home again.  
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,  
the world offers itself to your imagination,  
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting  
over and over announcing your place  
in the family of things.

We are called to love what we love, to find our place in the family of things. And we are surrounded by “John the Baptists,” those committed to pointing to the light, those passionate about sticking with love, those who would form, equip, challenge, inspire and release us to find what we are looking for. Are you watching, listening, open to what is to come? Are you imagining that you too are called to be a John the Baptist to others, because the darkness around us is deep and we so need to help each other see and follow the light? Come and see, Jesus said to his new disciples. Come and see, he calls to us in every moment and in every place – come and see what it means to stick with love, to follow, to live in the light that is the light of the world. It is 10:57 in the morning. Thanks be to God. Amen.