

"Come and See" John 1: 29 - 42

Have you ever tried a product or purchased an item because someone recommended it to you? Or maybe gone to a restaurant or ordered a book because someone else said they thought you'd enjoy it, or because they said it was fantastic?

I think we're far more likely to try something recommended by someone we know than by a stranger (or worse as a consequence of those annoying tele-sales calls that always come just when you don't need them!).

Well the first thing John the Baptist does in our gospel reading is what he's actually been doing all along - drawing our attention to Jesus and who he is. "Look, he says, *here is the Lamb of God!*" The *Agnus Dei* - which we say or sing at our Eucharistic services.

John the Baptist was the first to call Jesus the "Lamb of God." And you've got to wonder why in the world he would do that? After all aren't lambs such

helpless creatures? Could it be that he was implying that Jesus was weak or unimpressive?

Well absolutely not because the exact opposite is true. Let's remember that in the ancient near east titles were symbols of prestige- and this was actually an extremely prestigious title that John was giving Jesus, But if we're to appreciate its amazing significance for us today, we need to understand how Jewish people would have understood John's remarkable claim that *Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*. So (I know it's early) but let's get our thinking caps on.

Well for start this pronouncement would have got his hearers thinking about Israel's history (of lambs, of memories of being exiled in a foreign country, of sacrifices...) - So what would they have been led to think about and what connections would have been going

in their minds, do you think? Well how about this one - going way back: just as God had provided Abraham a lamb to sacrifice in the place of *his only son Isaac*, so is this Jesus the Lamb provided by God to be sacrificed in the place of others - indeed of everybody? *Is that what you're saying John?* And then those who knew their Hebrew scriptures would certainly have been drawn to making connections to the Servant Songs of Isaiah. "Just like a Lamb led to the slaughter' ...& 'one bearing the sins of the many'. *Are you saying it might be Jesus who fulfils the role of the suffering servant talked about in Isaiah 53? - is that what this is all about?*

But then John's insight penetrates still deeper into the mystery of how God intends to rescue, to redeem his people - and it leads to the whole process of what theologians call 'the Atonement'. They'd recall that when the people of Israel were captives - slave

labourers in Egypt - they were directed to do something: sprinkle the blood of a lamb (notice) 'without spot and without blemish' on the lintels of their doorways so that the Angel of Death didn't destroy them as they prepared for the big rescue - the Exodus. John states that in bearing all our sin by himself, Jesus 'takes it away' - he removes all its guilt and power to spoil our lives. *So is this all about a new Exodus? - a way out from being enslaved by the mess we've made of our lives - our own sinful condition? And is Jesus the scapegoat, bearing the curse for all my rubbish.*

It's not really possible to talk about Jesus *without* drawing attention to his work as Saviour, Rescuer, Deliverer - Jesus atoning for us - making us "at-one" (if you like) with God - so that when we were enemies; slaves to ourselves and to this world, Jesus brings us back into that relationship with God the Father he's always intended for us to enjoy.

...John knew that this was *God's Lamb*; this was his sacrifice for all of us; this was the way he was going to put things right and get his creation back - and so he gives Jesus the prestigious title no one else could ever dare hold. (Okay - so how are we doing?)

But all this has such an *edge* to it doesn't it? In a culture that sacrificed lambs twice a day in the temple, John's words must *also* have sounded like the kiss of death, because if you say "Here is the Lamb of God" it also means, "Look, everyone, here's the one that's going to be sacrificed - who's going to have to die." Suddenly, the title might not seem all that great. Yet, with the privilege we have of being able to look back, as we understand the finished work of the Lamb of God on the Cross, we can see that this name is as prestigious as it is honourable, because it's only Jesus who can take away the sins of the world. And we get that amazing picture from St. John the Divine in his Revelation right

at the end of the bible: that *this* is the Lamb who gets to be at the centre of the throne.

In the first of the *Narnia* books, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, Aslan is bound, muzzled and killed on a Stone Table'. But later Lucy and Susan "heard from behind them a loud noise - a great cracking, deafening noise...The Stone Table was broken into two pieces by a great crack that ran down it from end to end... and...There, shining in the sunrise, larger than they had seen him before, shaking his mane (for it had apparently grown again) stood Aslan himself.' Aslan tells them that 'when a willing victim who had committed no treachery was killed in a traitor's stead, the Table would crack and Death itself would start working backwards.' It's in an amazing way that CS Lewis attempts to show how Jesus can be both 'the Lion of the tribe of Judah' (Revelation 5:5) and 'a Lamb [that] had been slain'. This is the *paradox* of the gospel: Jesus

is both triumphant and slain. This is a God who reveals his glory and indeed the extent of his love, his heart for us through...? ...a Cross..

As I was preparing this (& similar to the feelings I expressed in last week's sermon for those who heard it - and if you didn't it's on the church website.) I was wondering whether any of us *really* understands the all-important work this Lamb accomplishes? And this is why we need to read the gospels for ourselves, because each one paints a picture, a portrait, of who Jesus is.

- Matthew shows him in amazing ways as the new Moses; as the King of Kings...emphasizing his Royalty;
- Mark shows him as God's servant, setting out his ministry and spending a lot of time on the significance of the Passion;

- & Luke? Well Luke displays him as the Son of Man ... showing his humanity - his compassion - for everybody - Jew and Gentile
- and John, eager to show him as the Son of God... highlights his deity. And so you'll find the gospel writers treating events in slightly different ways to bring this all out.

Anyway (back to the story) as I finish - what do the two disciples of John do after hearing him make this claim about Jesus a second time? Well they leave *him* and go after Jesus!

They don't start following Jesus blindly - because they've heard John's testimony. When they leave him to follow Jesus, they do so because of what John has been saying. John - by his life and his words - has led them to *consider* Jesus. They'd probably have been with John a while, and now they were following up on this by turning to follow the one he'd been pointing to - Jesus.

Think about it. The two men who went after Jesus at the beginning of our story *did so because someone they knew and trusted recommended him.*

One of those two disciples of John who followed Jesus was Andrew and the passage deliberately points out that the first thing he did was to find his brother Simon - the one closest to him. And Simon would become Peter, a major leader of the early church! You've got to wonder would Simon have considered getting to know Jesus without the witness of his brother? And (here's the application today) are there people close to *us* that need to hear our recommendation - and be convinced that it is a good idea to consider it because of the way we live? Are we - am I - a good advertisement? Or is there stuff getting in the way as I was saying last week: things about how we come across that would actively deter people from being interested?

So let's take stock: we've seen what the significance of being called the Lamb is; and we've seen the power of personal recommendation - just simply pointing to Jesus - maybe asking a friend to come with us sometime - no need for bashing them over the head.

And just one more thing. When John's two disciples turn to follow Jesus, Jesus intentionally turns to them and asks, "*What are you looking for?*" I mean, let's face it, he knows the answer already. He just wants the two men to say it. And their answer comes in the form of a question: "Where are you staying?"

Don't you love Jesus' answer here? "Come and see." It's like he's saying, "Come with me and see for yourself. Learn about who I am and what I'm like by hanging out with me." We're told the two disciples "remained with him that day." This is something everyone is invited to do: remain with Jesus - make your home with him; abide with him, dwell where he does.

I love how Eugene Peterson's Message version of the bible translates those famous 'Come to me all ye who labour and are heavy laden..' verses from Matthew 11. If you haven't heard these before have a listen:
"Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly."

I'm sure you can think of specific people whose personal witness played a significant role in your decision to follow Jesus? And those now who, when you're with them, bring something of his presence. God often, and usually does, work through people to draw us into a relationship with himself. And notice that although John the Baptist is called the forerunner of

Jesus, perhaps he didn't really know him as the Lamb of God 'til that day. John knew all about Jesus (he was his cousin after all) - but perhaps didn't know him. I so want people in our communities to know Jesus for themselves - and forgive me please, if I ever get in the way of doing that.

Charles Spurgeon - that great nineteenth century Baptist preacher said it best over 100 years ago...
"you may study, look, and meditate, but Jesus is a greater Saviour than we can ever think Him to be. Even when our thoughts are at their highest, Jesus is more willing to love us, help us, accept us, and forgive us, than we ourselves are. It is no wonder why we call Him the Saviour of our souls."

So...come and see - (or as Psalm 34 says) "taste and see that the Lord...is good". **Amen**