

Epiphany 2, '11
Twente/Arnhem

Isaiah 49:1-7
1 Corinthians 1:1-9; John 1:29-42

Come and see

'Follow me exercise': [A designated 'leader', carrying a toy lamb, goes to members of the congregation and asks, 'Would you like to come you come with me?' If they say 'yes' then they are led by the hand to the next person. Some will say 'no', and that is fine, the leader just moves on. Once a chain is formed, the minister asks the people (other than the leader) in the chain: 'Where are you going?' and then 'Why did you follow?']

Today, as ever, people look for direction in what often appears to them to be a directionless world.

U2, in the mid-1980s, did a rock song with a difference. It was based on Gospel music, and was driven by lead-singer and writer Bono's concern with spiritual doubt. It captures well how people often wander in search of meaning and love, but all the while lacking the wisdom and direction to settle in the right place. It's entitled, 'I still haven;t found what I'm looking for'. You can interpret it as a simple love song, but like most good poetry, you can see something deeper in it.

I have climbed highest mountain
I have run through the fields
Only to be with you/ Only to be with you

I have run / I have crawled
I have scaled these city walls
These city walls / Only to be with you

Refrain

But I still haven't found what I'm looking for
But I still haven't found what I'm looking for

What is particularly prophetic to me as a Christian and as a pastor, is how the song actually suggests that somewhere along the way, the singer must have had some sort of faith, but is still unfulfilled and remains non-committal. This combination of a little faith and a lot of

insecurity and restlessness is well diagnosed in this song. It is a good depiction where many people are. It goes:

I believe in the kingdom come / Then all the colors will bleed into one /
Bleed into one / Well yes I'm still running

You broke the bonds and you / Loosed the chains
Carried the cross / Of my shame / Of my shame
You know I believed it
But I still haven't found what I'm looking for
But I still haven't found what I'm looking for...

Today's Gospel passage offers direction. Moreover, it offers reasons for going that direction. And it also speaks of finding an end to the eternal searching.

John the Baptist offers direction. Most depictions of John the Baptist in Western art show him pointing. [Titian (1488/1490-1576), painter of later Italian Renaissance.]

John does not point to himself. John was no marketplace preacher, but went to the wilderness, ate simply, dressed plainly, and preached the Kingdom of God. People came to John to be washed because he lived what he preached. People came because, despite their religious upbringing, they still had not found what they were looking for. John the Baptist did not point to himself. If we do so, we miss the point, which is to point to Christ.

But why point to Christ? What reasons does John the Baptist offer to all those seekers who came out to him?

In the 4th Gospel, John the Baptist gives a Trinity of reasons (interesting), and each matters:

1. Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world
2. Jesus is of the Eternal God
3. Jesus is Anointed by God's Spirit to bring the Spirit

- 1) In John's Gospel, the Lamb is as a crucial symbol. Jesus is understood to have been killed on the day of Preparation when lambs were slain for the Jewish Passover (Jn 19:14). John the Baptist points to Jesus as the one who offers himself for us all, who takes away sin and death, who opens the way to the Promised Land.
- 2) John the Baptist also says, ³⁰This is he of whom I said, "After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me." John may just mean that Jesus ranks ahead of him as more important. But in this Gospel we later hear certain leaders of the Jews arguing with Jesus about his authority, and claiming for themselves that they are 'Abraham's children.' Jesus' shocking response to them is 'Before Abraham was, I am.' Christians have always believed Jesus to be more than a mere human, and to be one with the Eternal God in some mysterious and awesome way. 1:¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ¹⁴And the Word became flesh and lived among us.' J the B is attesting that Jesus is no short-lived religious leader. He is of the Eternal God.
- 3) The 3rd thing J the B says, this about Jesus' baptism: ^{32b}'I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. ³³I 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."

I doubt that John the Baptist's followers fully understood what he meant about Jesus, anymore than we understand everything. But they *were* open to following John's direction and exploring things further. Baptism, in Greek, is the same word as used for sinking a ship. John's followers were open to taking the plunge. Do we, if we are Christians, live the life in a way that people trust where we are pointing? And are we willing to plunge deeper into Christ's life?

A few of John's disciples trust John enough and are open enough to go deeper. John exclaimed, 'Look, here is the Lamb of God!' ³⁷Two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. ³⁸When Jesus turned and

saw them following, he said to them, 'What are you looking for?' They said to him, 'Rabbi, where are you staying?'

Staying is *μενειν*, a word frequent in John's Gospel, and it means far more than just over-nighting. Elsewhere *μενειν* is translated, 'Abide', as in 15: ⁴Abide in me as I abide in you... ⁵I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing... ⁹As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love.'

Jesus says to the disciples who have followed John the Baptist, 'You want to see where I abide – in whom and for whom and with whom, then ³⁹Come and see.' Come and see.

We do not, and in this life may never, have all the answers we want. But Jesus, the Lamb of God, who takes away sin, the Son of the Father, anointed by the Spirit to bring the Spirit to others, simply says to us, 'Come and see'. And John the Baptist simply points in the right direction, which makes a huge difference. Amen.