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Isaiah 49:1-7 & John 1:29-42
"Introductions"
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Rocky River Presbyterian Church

Old Testament Lesson Isaiah 49:1-7

Listen to me, O coastlands, pay attention, you peoples from far away! The Lord called me before I was born, while I was in my mother's womb, The Lord named me. ²The Lord made my mouth like a sharp sword, in the shadow of God's hand I was hidden; The Lord made me a polished arrow, in God's quiver I was hidden. ³And The Lord said to me, "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified." ⁴But I said, "I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity; yet surely my cause is with the Lord, and my reward with my God." ⁵And now the Lord says, who formed me in the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him, and that Israel might be gathered to him, for I am honored in the sight of the Lord, and my God has become my strength— ⁶The Lord says, "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel;
I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."
⁷Thus says the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel and The Holy One, to one deeply despised, abhorred by the nations, the slave of rulers, "Kings shall see and stand up, princes, and they shall prostrate themselves, because of the Lord, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you."

Gospel Lesson John 1:29-42

²⁹The next day John the Baptist saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, *"Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"* ³⁰*This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'* ³¹*I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel."* ³²And John testified, "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.' ³⁴And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God."

³⁵The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, ³⁶and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, *"Look, here is the Lamb of God!"* ³⁷The two 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" (which translated means Teacher), "where are you staying?" ³⁹He 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. ⁴⁰One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. ⁴¹He first found his brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated Anointed). ⁴²He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, "You are Simon, son of John. You are to be called Cephas" (which is translated Peter).

“Introductions”

Growing up in Charleston, SC, in the heart of the bible belt, I did not have the greatest introduction to Jesus. You see, I did not grow up going to church: I grew up in the Dock Street Theater where my dad was a professional stagehand - I grew up at the feet of actors embodying stories for others.

Even though I did not attend Sunday School, I heard PLENTY about Jesus, but I did not hear about the Lamb of God who came to take away the sins of the world. From the mouths of “church goers” I heard about a judgmental Jesus who was here to smite the wicked unless we changed our ways. I knew enough of the story to know deep in my soul that Jesus was not about punishment and alienation. Because of this, I actively rejected church all the way through high school. It wasn’t until I went to college that I was introduced to the living Jesus.

It was the first day of my freshman year, my parents had just dropped me off in my dorm at Clemson and started their drive home. I met a few friends from home and together we set off to explore campus. During our walk my friend, Nancy, suggested that we go with her to the Presbyterian Student Association to see her camp counselor. It took some convincing, but I trusted Nancy so we went. Walking into that student group that day was like coming home. The Campus Minister and the gathered community acted like John the Baptist and introduced me to the Lamb of God as they welcomed me and helped me find my place in God’s embrace.

During this season of Epiphany, the stories of scripture help us to see how the world continues to encounter and recognize the presence of Emmanuel – God with us in the world.

In Isaiah the servant of God says he or she was named and claimed by God for a purpose. *“You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified.”* But the Lord doesn’t stop there. God says, *“It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors to Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach the ends of the earth.”*

It is too light a thing that you should only tell my story to the tribes of Jacob – no you shall tell my story to the ends of the earth. Isaiah is telling us, the stories of salvation are not for the ones who know the story. It is for those who are going to hear it wherever they may be.

It is clear from the Gospel that people feel this pull to tell God’s story in every fiber of their being. The gospel reading is a whole sequence of people telling each other they have seen Jesus and who they think Jesus is. In today’s passage we encounter John the day after he has baptized Jesus; and just like anyone who has seen something amazing, he wants to tell people all about it. He is standing on the street when he sees Jesus coming toward him. **He announces to anyone who** would listen, *“Here is the Lamb of God!”* The way I see it in the theater in my head, John the Baptist is leaning against wall and see’s Jesus approaching. Something in him finally recognizes who he is and he just reaches out and clutches the arm of the nearest person and announces *“Here is the Lamb of God, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him.”*³³ *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.' ³⁴*And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God."*

I bet everyone was wondering what was happening. Maybe taking a wider path around John in that moment - avoiding him.

But John can't help himself. The next day he begins to tell the story again, "*Look, here is the Lamb of God,*" but before he can go into more detail two of his disciples peel away and begin to follow Jesus. At this point we don't know their names, we just know they followed. And it is in this moment that Jesus speaks for the first time in the Gospel of John.

Given that we don't encounter Jesus in this Gospel until he is an adult, I always expect these first words to be profound, but they are reassuringly normal. "*What are you looking for?*" John's disciples could have said, "we're looking for hope, we're looking for the messiah, we're looking for the Spirit", but instead, they ask, "Where are you staying?"

Many scholars believe this question has been lost in translation, explaining that this question was not about lodging, but about the nature of Jesus himself, offering instead that they would have been asking something along the lines of, "who are you, or where is the center of your life?" **Jesus doesn't try to explain, he** doesn't try to offer words, he merely invites them to "*come and see.*" He invites them to journey with him, to remain with him, to witness for themselves the center of Jesus' life.

From the text we know that they do remain with him. But in a passage full of details and personal testimony we don't know much about what happened during the time these two disciples spent with Jesus. All we know is that when it is time to leave one of those disciples was transformed. Andrew, we finally get a name, obviously had witnessed something amazing because he runs right out to tell others about it. He runs to his brother, Simon Peter, exclaiming, "We have found the Messiah," and while it is not recorded here, my best guess is he followed up that statement with "come and see!"

We don't know what happened during that time Andrew spent with Jesus, but I dare say more than a few of us have an idea. I would venture to say that more than a few of us have experienced something quite similar, a time when we have been invited to "come and see" only to find ourselves in the presence of the Spirit of the living God; a time that transformed our living, giving us a new vision for the ways things can and should be; a time that left us wanting to share with others, to introduce others, if you will, to the work of the Spirit in our lives.

Knowing that the Spirit is alive in this place, and knowing that we have each been called by name and charged to be light to the nations I wonder how good we are about introducing others to the life changing grace of God at work in the world. **How does our witness introduce others to the power** of Christ' love at work in our common life? How do we witness to the transforming love of God's incarnate word working in this place? In this time of transition, how are we reaching out to members and friends we have not seen here in our pews to share the light of the world and embody the love of the Lamb of God.

The idea of witnessing makes many uncomfortable. I understand this – as a youth I ran away from people who witnessed too aggressively, who ignored the ways God was already working in a person's life because it did not look exactly like some cookie cutter faith. But, my friends, this is not the kind of witness we see here today. Here in scripture we see simple invitation; we see introductions; we see time spent together; we see relationship. A form of invitation that I bet we are much more comfortable with. We have been given as light to the nations so that God's story of Love and grace might be made known to the end of the earth.

God wants the story of salvation told and calls people to tell it, calls them from their very beginning to introduce the stories of salvation to others - to use our words and our deeds to point others to the Lamb of God - so that all may know of the redeeming love of God in the world.

So my friends, I ask again. Can I get a witness? Can I get a witness who, like John the Baptist, gets so excited about the work of God in the world that they can't help but share it? Can I get a witness who is willing to share the journey with those who are hurting so they can offer peace and comfort when needed? Can I get a witness who is willing to say, Come and See?
