



Sermons at Burke Presbyterian Church

SHARE THE WORD

A Ministry of Burke Presbyterian Church
The Baptism of the Lord
John 1:29-42

Burke, Virginia
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Word Up: Come and See
The Rev. Meg Peery McLaughlin

Scripture: John 1:29-42

The next day he saw Jesus coming towards him and declared, 'Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!'³⁰This is he of whom I said, "After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me."³¹I 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.'

³⁵ The 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).

The Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Sermon:

We took our tree down,
it made our daughter Zanna cry, which admittedly doesn't take much,
but there is indeed a sadness putting the baby Jesus back in the box.

It's why we are starting this series on who Jesus is once he grows up,
as one of the four stories describes him.

The Gospel according John starts with a poetic declaration of who this Jesus is:
*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
The Word became Flesh and lived among us full of grace and truth.*

We read those verses every year as we prepare for Christmas,
and every other year of my ministry we also read about John the Baptist,
that wilderness preacher who cries: prepare the way of the Lord!

In the other three gospels, John the Baptist
wears strange clothes, eats strange food and baptizes for the forgiveness of sins.
In this Gospel, John is different.
Sure, he still baptizes, but mostly he points.
He points to the one who has already taken away the sins of the world.
He points to Jesus.

I am reminded of the Chinese proverb, “When a finger points to the moon,
the imbecile looks at the finger.” A kinder version is
“Do not mistake the pointing finger for the moon.”

John doesn’t want to get mistaken for Jesus.
In fact, in the verses just prior to what we read he is super clear:
He says:
I am not the Messiah.
I am not Elijah.
I am not a prophet.
John is a guy to simply tells what he himself has experienced,
and points to Jesus. Could be a good model for us, couldn’t he, church?

This first chapter of the Gospel is the chapter of Grand Introductions.
Jesus is called by so many names here:
Son of God, Lamb of God, Rabbi, Messiah,
and if you look at the whole of chapter 1, we could add:
Son of Man, King of Israel, Word made Flesh,
Him about whom the Moses and the prophets wrote, the Light.
Whew. I doubt all of that could fit on one business card.

As John’s Gospel progresses and as we continue this study and sermon series,
these titles will be expanded and redefined by Jesus.
But what’s fascinating to me is that when we’re trying to get a clue about who this Jesus is, there
isn’t one clear answer.
To insist on one name for Jesus is to miss the fullness of who he is.¹

But just as we are getting ready for a lesson in the complexity of this Jesus,
and just as we are ready to dig into this Gospel to learn who John is pointing to,
just as we are poised for our religious education,
Jesus goes and does what he does,

¹ Gail O’Day

he turns things upside down and around and asks,
What are *you* looking for?

Frances Taylor Gench is here.
She is a Professor of New Testament at Union Seminary.
And let me just say it's no small anxiety to preach to the woman who helped you read the Bible.

Anyway, what Frances will tell you is that you should always pay attention to the first words of Jesus in the Gospels.

With all these titles and all this talk, Jesus could have started a helpful lecture,
and let me tell you, Jesus is really verbose in John's Gospel,
so I wouldn't put it past him, but no, his first words are:

What are you looking for?

It is a beautiful question, open-ended without any kind of assumptions or judgment.
Jesus doesn't start by telling his new disciples what he thinks they need to know.
He starts by questioning what is deepest in their souls.²

We could learn from these words.

It would do us well to ask ourselves, each other: what are you looking for?
When it comes to this experience of faith, what are you looking for?
When you seek a relationship with Jesus, what is it that you're hoping for?

So often the church gets it wrong, when we try to tell people what they *ought* to be looking for,
rather than giving them the confidence to begin their own journey with the tools we've been
entrusted with here at church: this story, this feast, this water, these people.

So often we assume we already know the answers and we exhaust ourselves delivering
programs that may or may not be helpful,
and we fail to find out what people are really dealing with:
what it is they grieve or hope or yearn for.

One preacher challenged me when he said he did not want to be part of a church that offered a
packaged version of Jesus, but rather,
he wanted a community that encourages people to take the next step with him,
to come and see what he's about.

After all, that's his invitation.

"Come and see," Jesus says to these brand-spanking new disciples when they ask where he is
staying. After all those grand introductions, Jesus seems to suggest that we know one another not
by titles or names, but ultimately by how we live.

How ordinary. Jesus has gone from being the Lamb of God to a guy having some other guys over
to his place.

² Andrew Foster Connors, *The Well* 2013

“Come and see.” He offers.
Not sit and learn, but come and see.
Not understand, but experience.
Come and see.

Here at this church,
two young women, a teenager Isabel Tashima,
and a tad-more-than-teenager, Amanda Deaton
have been wearing dresses all of December
to raise awareness and money to end the trafficking of women.

The parent group of their effort is the International Justice Mission.
Gary Haugen, it’s founder, spoke at a Presbyterian conference a number of years ago,
about how cautious the church has become,
out of a fear of losing its members or life.

We try to hedge our risks, and mince our words,
and keep all parties happy and safe—
when what people desperately want is to be part of something
dangerously adventurous and meaningful.

He told the story of when he was ten years old
going to Mt. Ranier with his father and brothers.
At the base of the mountain there is a visitors center situated in a beautiful meadow. From the
visitors center a set of paved trails winds up
the mountain until the paved trails end
and there’s a big sign written by lawyers telling you all the bad things that can happen to you if
you go beyond that point up the unpaved trail.

At ten years old, Gary told his father,
“You know I think I’ll just go back down to the visitors’ center.”
His father tried to persuade him, “I know it will be hard,
but I think you’ll be glad you came.”
“No, no” insisted Gary “I’d really rather spend the day at the visitors’ center.”
And he went back down.

He spent hours in the visitors’ center watching films about other people hiking the mountain
loop again and again. This is what the church so often has become. People who come to the
visitors center to hear about other people going off to do interesting, adventurous, and important
things. But inside a lot of us are wishing we had gone up on that mountain.

Come and see, Jesus invites you.
Come and see if this is the healing for which your heart is yearning.
Come and see if this is hope your spirit has been longing to cling to.
Come and see if this is the courage you need to keep working in this old world.
Come and see if this is the freedom you need from your shame.
Come and see if this is the food you’re hungry for.
Come and see if this is the life you’re looking for.

Come and see.

I hope you'll do that searching, that journeying here with us,
but of course this church is not the point,
but I am incredibly grateful for the way you who are here in this place
are the fingers that keep inviting me to see the moon,
the light in the darkness that is Jesus the Christ.