

Encounters with Jesus – Who Are You?

John 1:29-34

2nd Sunday After the Epiphany

January 19, 2020

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John 1:29-34 (NRSV) The Lamb of God

²⁹The next day he saw Jesus coming toward 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.”^[a]

If I handed out sticky badges that say “Hello I Am: _____” how would you fill in the blank? How do you identify yourself?

My full name is Deanne but I’d write Dea - it’s easier.

Or your job title? I’d fill in “Pastor Dea.”

Or how ‘bout family title? “Don and Donna’s daughter...Cannon’s Grammy.”

How do you identify yourself?

Today, as we continue in Epiphany, let’s stay on the “encounters with Jesus” theme and notice again how those encounters affect our lives as followers of Christ.

We met John the Baptizer last week.

What’s on his name badge?

- Jesus’ cousin.
- Prophet – “I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness.”

Earlier in John’s gospel we know that JOHN KNOWS he’s being observed by priests and Levites who’d been sent from Jerusalem to find out “*who is this dude?*”

John had quite a reputation.

He was a “hippie from the wilderness” and his message was sharp and to the point.

He didn’t mince words about Herod and his mistress...

...and didn’t hesitate to tell the Jews that *just because* they were descendants of Abraham their family genealogy didn’t mean anything.

Connections and power didn’t mean diddly to John.

Having a repentant heart is what mattered.

His message was for a radical change.

John was on the scene to prepare others for the coming Messiah.

But the Levites want to pin John down, ‘cause knowing *who he is* would help **them** figure out how to respond to him.

They won’t go away: “Who are you?”

And instead of telling them who he is, he tells them who he is not: “*I am not the Messiah.*”

Okay. “Are you Elijah?”

Nope

“You must be a prophet?”

No. Again.

They *think they know* that he has to have something to do with the Messiah.

A prophet is *supposed* to come – they know the Torah and the writings of the prophets.

Israelites have expectations about a prophet sooooo was John one?

John refuses almost any identification but the priests need SOMETHING to tell their superiors. “WHO ARE YOU?” Give us something, ANYTHING!

And what does John say? ('Cause the writer of today's gospel doesn't even put "Baptist" on his name tag.) John says "I am the **voice** of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord.'"

The VOICE! And he throws a verse from Isaiah (40:3) back at them.

But, what does this tell us about John?

Not much. Or?????

See, John has a focused message – pinpointed right on the ONE who was coming...that people needed to be prepared for.

The center of his attention was SOMEONE and John's mission was JESUS – THAT was his message!

And to be clear – John's not making this up.

We heard Gretchen read for us John's testimony:

"The one who sent ME to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend on [which we know happened when Jesus came out of the water and that John saw that] is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.'"

Someone has told John that, so, John can testify, 'cause "I saw it," John says.

"THAT is the Son of God."

He's an eye-witness.

John can willingly identified himself with this Jesus.

And, at every turn, whenever the chance comes, John points away from himself and toward Jesus.

John was self-denying and Christ-focused.

He knew, and accepted, the difference between himself and Jesus.

He knew that while he was baptizing people, Jesus who would change people.

He was a witness to Jesus and that meant moving all attention TOWARD Jesus, the Lamb of God.

When John finally DOES give a little information about who he is, *DID YOU NOTICE* he simply, BUT completely, FILLS in his name badge with his relationship with

Jesus, whose identity determines John's identity, defines his mission, and gives direction to his life.

Earlier I asked how you'd fill in a "Hello, I AM: _____" badge.

How'd you identify yourself?

- Parent?
- Teacher?
- Chair of a church committee?
- So-and-so's spouse?

There are a lot of ways we form our identity; how we describe ourselves.

But, if somebody came up to you (like the priests did John) and asked, "*Who are you? We need an answer for our superiors. What do you say about yourself,*" what would you say?

Here's a better question: **How should WE respond to a question like that?**

Our midweek Bible study is diving into Philippians – (still time to join us) and in the third chapter of this letter from Paul, Paul tells audience that he has plenty to brag about, all kinds of reasons to have, as he says, for his confidence.

"I was circumcised and a Jew, from the tribe of Benjamin...

...I know the law, I was a Pharisee; and pretty zealous to persecute the young church."

Wow! What else could Paul need? His identity is confident.

However, (if you'll study with us) we read that Paul continues,

"Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him,...."

Whatever reputation he had, whatever human reason for his confidence, Paul considers those things **rubbish**.

Instead of placing the emphasis on himself, like John the Baptizer Paul identifies himself completely with Jesus.

To put it another way, Paul is willing to give up his status and any other reason for boasting.

Now, TO BE CLEAR, none of us is John the Baptizer or Paul the Apostle.

But, these men are examples to us because we're called to do just what they DID: identify ourselves completely with Jesus....

...to be less concerned with people knowing **who we are** and more on letting people know who Jesus is.

A wiser-than-me theologian (~~Rev. William Secker~~) once said,

"It would be well if there were as great a similarity between the life of Christ and the life of Christians, as there is between a just copy and the original. What He was by nature, we should be by grace."

Further on in John's gospel (ch. 3) some of John the Baptizer's disciples were having a discussion when Jesus' ministry had begun - even while John's disciples were baptizing people. They wanted to know, from John, whether Jesus was a competitor. Was Jesus going to take attention away from John's ministry.

John put the fast kibosh on THAT.

He reminded them that he'd testified "I'm not the Messiah! I've been sent ahead of him." And he repeated that Jesus was superior to him, Jesus is the bridegroom, I'm just the bridegroom's friend... I stand by and...

"rejoice greatly at the bridegroom's voice. For this reason my joy has been fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease."

He must increase, but I must decrease.

Those ought to be our words, too, AND, when we really notice this encounter with Jesus, our lives are affected.

The purpose of our lives is for the character of Christ to shape and form us.

We are being remade into His image.

And who we are, how we fill in the “Hello I Am” badge should be primarily determined by our relationship with Jesus.

Who we are in Jesus: Children of God, matters most of all.

Our identity in Jesus means that we are **called** to be humble, self-decreasing servants of the Son of God like John and Paul.

Don't freak out.

This doesn't mean we're all supposed to be prophets or evangelists.

But, we **are called** to testify (like John) and witness (like Paul) to Jesus from whatever point WE ARE.

That's part of God's plan – because wherever we are, there are people that need us to be Jesus to them.

Your identity might be a

- parent who brings your little ones to God like Jesus did.
- Or a spouse who identifies with Jesus through acts of selfless sacrifice, love and faithfulness.
- As a child (no matter our age), we can identify with Jesus who was obedient to his Father in heaven.
- As a neighbor, we can identify with Jesus by loving those no one else is willing to love.

To be these witnesses we need to identify ourselves with Jesus and surrender more and more to Him. And that requires, every day, that we have a discipline of prayer, of studying the Bible, and being a part of a community like our Family of Faith.

See – you've already got a great start!

Identifying ourselves with Jesus means we've got to know who Jesus is – which means watching Him closely and *noticing*, with EACH encounter with him, WHO WE ARE as his followers.

Fill in your sticky badge with confidence, “Hello, I AM: A follower of Jesus Christ!”

Amen!