

John 1:35-42

³⁵ The next day John was there again with two of his disciples, ³⁶ and as he watched Jesus walk by, he said, “Behold, the Lamb of God.” ³⁷ The two disciples heard what he said and followed Jesus. ³⁸ Jesus turned and saw them following him and said to them, “What are you looking for?” They said to him, “Rabbi” (which translated means Teacher), “where are you staying?” ³⁹ He said to them, “Come, and you will see.” So they went and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day. It was about four in the afternoon. ⁴⁰ Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter, was one of the two who heard John and followed Jesus. ⁴¹ He first found his own brother Simon and told him, “We have found the Messiah” (which is translated Anointed). ⁴² Then he brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, “You are Simon the son of John; you will be called Kephas” (which is translated Peter).

Context

In the prologue the Fourth Evangelist presented John the Baptist as “a man sent from God” who “came for testimony, to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to testify to the light.” (John 1:6-8; see also 1:15; and later 5:33) This opening characterization sets the stage for the narration of John’s ministry in 1:19–34. John’s identity is further probed when he is called to account by a delegation sent by the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem. Three times John denies being a particular end-time figure: the Christ (1:20; cf. 1:8, 15); Elijah (1:21a); the Prophet (1:21b; cf. 6:14; 7:40; cf. Deut. 18:15, 18).

After thus affirming three times who he is *not*, John in the present passage, at long last, is telling his interrogators who he *is*. Even though he is none of the scriptural figures expected to make their appearance in Israel in the last days, John does respond in terms of a figure spoken of in Scripture. He is “*the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord’*” (1:23) featured in Isaiah 40:3. In this characterization of John, the Fourth Evangelist joins together fully with the Synoptic portrayal of the Baptist (cf. Matt. 3:3; Mark 1:3; Luke 3:4). According to the Fourth Evangelist, John’s witness centered on Jesus’ role in the divine plan of salvation as the “*Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*” (1:29, 36). At its very heart, the purpose of John’s baptism and ministry is described as being bound up with revealing Jesus’ true identity to Israel (1:31).

Each year in the Lectionary Cycle (A: Matthew; B:Mark; C:Luke) the gospel for the 2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time is taken from the first chapter of the Gospel according to John. The purpose for this is essentially the same – following the baptism of the Lord, which reveals the relationship of the Father to the Son and to the Holy Spirit – this week’s gospel reveals the relationship of Jesus to the disciples. And perhaps no one does so more robustly than the Fourth Evangelist.

The fourth Gospel is a book of “signs;” namely things, events, and people who point to something else. Such “intermediaries” are generally necessary in this gospel in order to come to faith. Even Jesus is a type of intermediary as the *logos* – the “Word” or “Revealer” of God. The theme and purpose of the “signage” becomes clear in John 20:31 – “*But these are written that you may (come to) believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through this belief you may have life in his name.*” This gospel itself is a “sign” to point us to the Messiah, who is a “sign” who points us to God. As O’Day (524) states about this gospel: “... the story of Jesus is not ultimately a story about Jesus; it is, in fact, the story of God.”

It is to this that John testifies: “*Now I have seen and testified that he is the Son of God.*”

Commentary

In vv.19-34 we have seen John the Baptist bearing his witness. Now we find him sending some of his followers after the Lord. There are accounts of a “call” in the Synoptics (e.g., Mark 1:16–20), but they

differ greatly from this. The Fourth Gospel tells of a call to be disciples; the Synoptics of a call to be apostles. John's theme is not the calling of the apostles into office; it is their call to relationship with Christ. Strictly speaking, there is no "call" in this Gospel (except in the case of Philip, v. 43). Jesus does not call the disciples and John the Baptist does not send his disciples to Jesus; Jesus and his role as *the Lamb of God* is pointed out – or rather John's witness. The English leaves a bit of room as to how to understand the disciples' motivation. Are they curious, intrigued or do they perhaps recognize the Messiah and spontaneously follow.

One should note that John's whole ministry was forward-looking, and he had instructed his disciples well. Thus it is likely that when this pair heard Jesus acclaimed as "the Lamb of God" they knew what was expected of them. They immediately left John and followed Jesus. The verb "followed" is in the tense appropriate for once-for-all action, which may indicate that they cast in their lot with Jesus. They did not mean to make a tentative inquiry but to give themselves to him. We should also notice that the verb has both a general sense of "follow" and a more specific sense of "follow as a disciple." In this place both senses may be in mind. They walked down the path after Jesus and thus followed. But they also symbolically committed themselves to him.

As the two approached Jesus he turned and asked, "*What are you looking for?*" It is very natural to think they did not know what to say, for "*where are you staying?*" is not really an answer to the question. Their words probably imply that what they wanted with him could not be settled in a few minutes by the wayside. They looked for a long talk. John Calvin notes that this is a critical flexure point in one's journey of faith. Calvin notes that there are many who are satisfied "with a bare passing look.... For there are very many who merely sniff at the Gospel from a distance, and thus let Christ suddenly disappear, and whatever they have learned about Him slip away."

The question "*where are you staying?*" uses a Johannine word, *menō*, that is used elsewhere in the Fourth Gospel to assert that the relationship of God, Jesus and the Spirit with one another and with believers (e.g., 1:32,33; 8:31, 35; 14:10, 17; throughout ch. 15) is permanent and not sporadic.

The two address Jesus as "Rabbi," the customary form of address for disciples speaking to their teacher. The Evangelist explains the Aramaic word for the benefit of his non-Jewish readers.

Come and See

John witnesses to his two disciples who then follow Jesus. One of them, Andrew, witnesses to his brother Peter. In vv.43-51, Jesus finds Philip without a witness, but then Philip finds Nathanael and witnesses to him about Jesus. Generally, a witness is needed to help others "see" Jesus. In fact, these two events may indicate that one cannot adequately follow Jesus without also extending the invitation to others.

The invitation, "Come and see," is given twice (1:39, 46). The essence of our witness is to state what we have seen and believe and then to invite others to "come and see." For John, faith begins by responding to the invitation to "come and see." The same words (in English, but slightly different in Greek) are uttered by the Samaritan woman to the people, "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?" (4:29)

The same combination of words is used at the end of the gospel: Mary comes and sees that the stone has been removed from the tomb (20:1). Peter and the other disciple come to the tomb and look in and see. The other disciple sees and believes (20:3-8).

It was Jesus who turned and first spoke to the two disciples of John who were following him (1:38). It is Jesus who speaks first to Simon (v.42). It is Jesus who finds Philip and speaks to him (v. 43). Nathanael didn't find Jesus. Jesus found him! It is Jesus whose words draw out Nathanael's good

confession (vv.47-49). We can never lose sight of the primacy of God's gracious acts that evoke our response. However, Andrew's witness to Simon is, "We have found the Messiah."

Andrew

Three times Andrew is doing something in John – 'and each time he is bringing someone to Jesus. First, his brother, Simon (v.40). Then, a boy with five barley loaves and two fish (6:8); and finally, "some Greeks" (12:20-22), which signals the hour for the Son of Man to be glorified.

Andrew is never mentioned just by himself. Twice he is called Simon Peter's brother (1:40; 6:8). We are told that Philip came from the city of Andrew and Simon (1:44). Andrew and Philip go and tell Jesus about the Greeks (12:22). It may be that being named as the first follower of Jesus (in the Fourth Gospel) was the first time that he had ever been first in anything. It seems likely to me that he was always living under the shadow of his more flamboyant brother. It also seems to me that our parishes are full of more behind-the-scenes "Andrews" than flamboyant "Peters" who seem to get all the credit. ("Peter" occurs in 32 verses in John – '8 times as many as Andrew.) One doesn't have to be a "Peter" to be an effective follower and witness to Jesus.

Finding Jesus

Francis Moloney (54-55) points out an issue with Andrew telling Simon the "*We have found....*" Moloney and many other scholars point out that there are two definitions for Greek *heurisko*: (1) to learn the location of something, either by intentional searching or by unexpected discovery; and (2) to learn something previously not known, frequently involving an element of surprise. It is the aspect of "unexpected discovery" or "surprise" that isn't translated well by our word "to find," which, I think, conveys more of the sense of "intentional searching." Moloney writes:

"Andrew has told Simon, 'We have found' (*heurekamen*), and this is not true (v. 41). The Baptist pointed his disciples toward Jesus, and they followed (vv. 36-37). They were invited by Jesus to come and see, and they did what they were told (v. 39). The initiative for their presence with Jesus and their understanding of him does not belong to them... Andrew led Simon to Jesus he looked at him and spoke to him. The initiative is entirely with Jesus."

The Messiah

While there is a scholarly debate about how to render the word "first" (v.41), most scholars understand the passage to mean, that the next morning Andrew promptly went in search of his brother. When he found him he told him that they (his plural "we" means that he was already thinking of a community) had found the Messiah (an expression that occurs only here and in 4:25 in the New Testament). In his customary manner the Evangelist explains that this word means "*Anointed.*"

This early recognition of Jesus as the Messiah puzzles some in view of the indications in the Synoptic Gospels that it was a long time before the disciples had anything like an adequate view of Jesus. But, as one scholar (Hoskyns) puts it, "the Evangelist does not, as is often supposed, idealize the first disciples, since it is precisely the title Christ which requires interpretation." There is no great mystery about the disciples' thinking of Jesus as the Messiah. There seem to have been many claimants to messiahship in that period. It was the content put into the term that mattered. All the evidence is that it was quite some time before any of Jesus' followers reached anything like an adequate understanding of the term. But that does not mean that they did not use it. It was easy to call Jesus "Messiah"; it was quite another thing to understand what this should mean as he interpreted his vocation. Part of the Fourth Gospel's purpose appears to be to refute erroneous ideas about messiahship. It would be quite in accordance with this that he should record the disciples' first inadequate recognition of Jesus as Messiah, preparatory to unfolding in his Gospel the true meaning of the messianic office. Messiahship means a good deal to John. He writes his whole Gospel to make us see that Jesus is the Messiah.

Simon Peter

Andrew brought his brother to Jesus, an act of which is perhaps as great a service to the Church as ever any man did. Jesus gave the newcomer a searching look and proceeded to rename him. This must be understood in the light of the significance attaching to the “name” in antiquity. It stood for the whole person. It summed up the entire personality. The giving of a new name is an assertion of the authority of the giver (e.g., 2 Kings 23:34; 24:17). When done by God it speaks in addition of a new character in which the person henceforth appears (e.g., Gen. 32:28). There is something of both ideas here. Simon is from this time Jesus’ man. But he is also a different man, and the new name points to his character as “the rock man. Peter appears in all the Gospels as anything but a rock. He is impulsive, volatile, unreliable. But that was not God’s last word for Peter. Jesus’ renaming of the man points to the change that would be wrought in him by the power of God.

Notes

John 1:35 *the next day*: although broader than the context of this Sunday’s reading, be aware that this simple expression “*the next day*” is part of a counting of days that occurs from 1:19-2:12 in which the Fourth Evangelist enumerates the seven days of a “new creation” in the coming and revelation of Jesus. ***lamb*:** The reference to Jesus here as ‘the Lamb of God’ uses the word *amnos* for ‘lamb’. It is one of only four references in the NT (John 1:29, 36; Acts 8:32; 1 Pet. 1:19) that do so. The word *amnos* is found 101 times in the LXX, of which 82 are references to sacrificial lambs. The two uses of *amnos* in the NT outside the Fourth Gospel are clear references to Jesus, who died as a sacrificial lamb: one speaks of Jesus as the servant of the Lord, who ‘was led like a sheep to the slaughter, / and as a lamb before the shearer is silent’ (Acts 8:32); the other refers to ‘the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect’ (1 Pet. 1:19). In the light of all this we are probably correct to say that the evangelist would be happy if his readers took John’s witness to Jesus as ‘the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world’ to have a double meaning. He was both the apocalyptic lamb who judges unrepentant sinners, and the atoning sacrifice for the sins of those who believe. Perhaps the evangelist believed John spoke more than he knew, just as Caiaphas and Pilate were to do later on (11:50–52; 18:39; 19:14–15, 19, 21–22).

John 1:37 *the two disciples*: Andrew (Jn 1:40) and, traditionally, John, son of Zebedee. ***followed*:** the verb *akoloutheō* is associated with discipleship across all the gospels with both the physical sense and the spiritual “following.” [EDNT 1:49-54]

John 1:38 *Rabbi*: רַבִּי (rabbi) means literally “my great one.” [EDNT 3:205-6] But the personal pronoun tended to become conventional, as in *monsieur* or *madame*. The word was used very much like our “Sir.” Some scholars maintain that John’s statement is anachronistic, on the grounds that the title was not in use before A.D. 70. Brown, however, cites Sukenik, who discovered an ossuary on the Mount of Olives that he dates several generations before the destruction of the Temple and that uses διδάσκαλος as a title. This may well indicate that “Rabbi” was in use in this way, though it is not absolutely conclusive, for διδάσκαλος does not always represent רַבִּי. W. D. Davies has no doubt about the usage in Jesus’ day, for he devotes a section of his great work on the Sermon on the Mount to Jesus as “The Rabbi,” and he says explicitly: “He was called rabbi. While in his day the title did not have the exact connotation of one officially ordained to teach that it later acquired, it was more than a courtesy title: it did designate a ‘teacher’ in the strict sense” (*The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount* [Cambridge, 1964], p. 422).

John 1:39 *four in the afternoon*: literally, the tenth hour, from sunrise, in the Roman calculation of time. Some suggest that the next day, beginning at sunset, was the sabbath; they would have stayed with Jesus to avoid travel on it.

John 1:41 Messiah: the Hebrew word *māšiāh*, “anointed one”, appears in Greek as the transliterated *messias* only here and in Jn 4:25. Elsewhere the Greek translation *christos* is used.

John 1:42 Simon, the son of John: in Mt 16:17, Simon is called *Bariona*, “son of Jonah,” a different tradition for the name of Simon’s father. Neither the Greek equivalent *Petros* nor, with one isolated exception, *Cephas* is attested as a personal name before Christian times. *Kephas* is our transliteration of the Aramaic כִּפְּתָא, meaning “rock.” Peter is from the Greek πέτρος with much the same meaning. Strictly the Greek equivalent of *Kephas* is Πέτρα, but this has a feminine ending and the less usual masculine form is used for Simon’s new name. Originally πέτρα meant the solid rock and πέτρος a stone, a piece of rock, but the two seem not to have been sharply distinguished in New Testament times (see O. Cullmann, *Peter: Disciple, Apostle, Martyr* [London, 1962], pp. 20–21). *Kephas* does not occur in any of the other Gospels. It points to an Aramaic-speaking author, as anyone else would use the common form, Peter. This is John’s only use of the name *Kephas*. Indeed, apart from this passage the term is found only in Paul.

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