

“Who Would You Tell?”

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John 1:29-46

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The pastor of a church was bothered by the fact that when the weather was pleasant, several members of his congregation would skip worship in order to go play golf on Sunday morning. So one week he'd had enough of it and so on Saturday night he called one of the elders and explained that he was sick and that they would have to find someone else to preach that next day.

But he wasn't sick at all. Instead, early on Sunday morning, before the sun came up, the pastor loaded his golf clubs in his car and drove to a golf course an hour away so that no one would recognize him. When he gets there the sun is up and it's a perfect day to play golf.

Now one of God's angels is watching all of this and thinks, this guy's really going get it. God's not going to let him get away with this. But the pastor gets to the first tee-box, he tees up and hits the ball. He knows instantly that it's going to be a good shot. Sure enough, the ball hits the green, rolls and drops right into the cup. It's a hole-in-one. The pastor's amazed. It's his first hole-in-one ever. And then, at the next hole, he does it again. This is turning out to be his best game ever.

The angel has been watching this and is really getting upset. So he goes to God and says, "I can't believe you're letting him get away with this. I thought you would zap him or something and instead he's having the best game of his life." But God just smiles at the angel and says, "Who's he going to tell?"

I think it's safe to say that every one of us likes to share good news with other people. We can't help it. Whether you shot a hole-in-one on the golf course or you caught your limit of 28 inch redfish or even if you have a new baby or grandbaby, you want other people to know about it and celebrate with you.

Our Scripture reading this morning begins with John the Baptist pointing out Jesus to some people. He says, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who

takes away the sin of the world!" Then he says, "this is the guy I was telling you about." Then he says, "I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God."

The New Testament uses lots of titles for Jesus and it would take the rest of the morning just to name them all. But this first chapter of John's gospel uses quite a few. The chapter begins by calling Jesus the Word, the Logos of God. "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God." He's also called the "true light," the "Son of God," "Rabbi," "Messiah," "King of Israel," "Son of Man," and "Lamb of God."

What John is making very clear with these titles is that Jesus is not just some other human. He is God, come to earth; God with us, Emmanuel. But he's also pointing us to the reality of what Jesus ultimately did for us on the cross. He took away our sins. We can trace the idea of the Lamb of God back to Genesis 22 where God commanded Abraham to sacrifice his only son Isaac. Abraham is obedient and takes Isaac up onto the mountain and is prepared to sacrifice him when God says, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me."

At that point God provides a ram, caught in the brush, for Abraham to use as the sacrifice. The ram was a sacrificial substitute for Abraham's son. That's the idea of the atonement of Christ. Jesus acts as our substitute to pay the price for our sin.

Another place we find the idea of the Lamb of God saving people is in the Passover in Exodus 12. On the night that he was bringing the final plague on the Egyptians, the death of every first-born animal or child, God promised to pass over all the houses where He saw the blood of the lambs on the doorposts. There was certainly no question about who John claimed Jesus was.

So the next day Jesus comes by again and John the Baptist says the same thing. “Behold, the Lamb of God.” This time two of John’s followers hear him say it and so they decide they’re going with Jesus. We’re told that Jesus invited them to stay with him that evening and he spent time teaching them, which is what rabbis did.

It turns out that one of them is Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. Notice what Andrew does in response to meeting Jesus. Verse 41 tells us that the first thing Andrew did was to go find his brother Simon and tell him, “We have found the Messiah.” And then the Bible tells us that he brought Simon to see Jesus in person.

The next day the same thing happens again with Philip and Nathanael. I think it’s safe to say that Philip knew Simon Peter and Andrew. Verse 44 tells us, “Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Peter and Andrew may have even told Jesus about Philip. When Philip meets Jesus he is also convinced that Jesus is the Messiah. He’s so excited he has to go tell someone and he goes and finds Nathanael.

Friends, what we have here is the biblical model of evangelism for the church. Many of us are intimidated by the idea of evangelism. We’re not comfortable trying to convince people to follow Jesus, or maybe we think about one of the other faith traditions that goes door to door, maybe pressuring you with *their* religion.

I think one of the things that keeps many of us from telling people the good news of Jesus is that we feel like we don’t have enough knowledge to be able to answer all of their questions or arguments. But think for a moment about Andrew and Philip. How much did they know about Jesus? Not much. They had only just met him. But they were changed forever by meeting Jesus and they just had to tell someone. In his commentary on this passage John Calvin wrote, “Andrew has scarcely one spark; and yet by it he enlightens his brother.” In the same way, we are only willing to tell other people about Jesus because *we* have encountered him ourselves. Where do we encounter Jesus? In the Bible, which primarily points us to Christ, and in fellowship with his followers – in the Church.

It seems to me that there are some principles that we can learn from Andrew and Philip about evangelism. The first key to evangelism is to share what you know. A witness in a court trial is only asked to tell what he has seen and what he knows. That’s all we’re asked to do. We simply tell other people what Jesus has done for us. John tells his followers, “I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him.” Then he says, “I have *seen*...that this is the Son of God.”

In the same way Andrew tells Peter, “We have found the Messiah.” Philip tells Nathanael, “We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote.” They hadn’t been around Jesus very long and so they certainly didn’t know much about him. But what they did know they shared with someone else.

We find the second key to effective evangelism by looking at the responses of Andrew and Philip. We’re told that Andrew *first* went and found his brother. Then the two of them took Jesus to meet Philip and Philip went and found Nathanael. In each case they first went and shared the good news with someone that they knew, not strangers. It’s the same for us. We will be most effective inviting people that we already know. They trust us and are more willing to listen.

The third thing I want you to see from this passage is that we are not called to convince people of anything. We’re not to go out and argue with people or start a religious war. Instead, our task is to invite people to meet Jesus for themselves. When Philip invites Nathanael, they could have gotten into an argument. Nathanael says, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” But Philip doesn’t get into a fight. He simply says, “Come and see. Check it out for yourself.”

That’s what you and I should be doing. We should be inviting people to meet Jesus because we know that their lives will be changed forever. There are a number of ways you can invite people to “come and see” Jesus. One of the best ways to get started is to invite people to “Back to Church Sunday” in two weeks. That’s why we do it, to give you tools and an opportunity to invite people to check out Jesus and to check out

our church. The invitation can be as simple as handing someone one of the postcards and saying, "I'd like to invite you to this special event at my church. I really hope you'll come."

You can invite people to worship with us or to come with you to a Bible study or just spend some time telling someone what God is doing in your life. Finally, you can ask people how you can pray for them, which may open the door to conversations about Jesus.

So the question for us today is this: why *aren't* we inviting people to come and see? What's stopping us? If we really believe that the good news *is* good news, we couldn't help but tell other people. We have the best news ever. The God who created us loves us so much that he came here as one of us, died for our sins but rose from the dead so that death could no longer have power over us. Now he says to each of us, "follow me." You know, that's way better than a hole-in-one.

Amen