

“Community of Witness,” John 1:29-42; 1/20/08; Albany UMC

In today’s Gospel lesson, we see John the Baptist one more time. But it is interesting that this book gives us a different picture in terms of what John does to Jesus. Of course, John is described as the one who baptizes people. But here in this Gospel, no verses say that John *actually baptized* Jesus. Verse 31 only says that his baptism was to reveal Jesus to Israel.

It is also interesting that John says in verses 31 and 33, he did not know Jesus. Isn’t this strange? The book does not say John and Jesus were related; the only reason John knew Jesus was because he saw the Spirit of God come down upon Jesus. In Jesus’ baptism, it does not say that John put his hands on Jesus’ head; the actors are God and the Spirit, not John. John’s role was just to point people to Jesus; he is not the Messiah but a small finger that points to Jesus.

The Christian life is about being a finger, the finger of God that points to Jesus. This is a long weekend because tomorrow is Martin Luther King Jr.’s birthday. We observe this holiday to honor what this man of God, Dr. King, did some 40 years ago for this country. We could say many things about him but everything Dr. King did and said was pointing America to the vision, the vision of God that he saw through the word of God. He didn’t look down to look for solutions to the problems America had back then. He looked up to God for his vision and he asked people to look up too.

He saw that one day this country would become a place where all people were respected and treated equally. He saw that there was hope in the world because God was the hope. He saw that love and forgiveness would be the ultimate forces that win. Dr. King did not just preach about this. He gave his life for it. When America was still in a dark age, God called and used Dr. King to be his finger so that this country might look beyond.

In today's text John the Baptist points his finger to Jesus; he says he is not the Messiah but a finger that points to the one who is Messiah! John said he did not know Jesus before; he did not know, he says it twice. But now he knows him because he saw the Spirit of God was upon him. He knows him now because God told him that he upon whom he sees the Spirit descending and remaining would be the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.

I had not known God before; I had not known Jesus until I saw the Holy Spirit come down upon me when I was in college. I had never felt 100% for sure if God really existed. One day I got terribly sick and went to the doctor, who said I needed to be hospitalized. He said I need to be treated for 3 weeks because my whole body turned yellow; my urine was yellow; my skin was yellow; my eyes were yellow. But I knew I couldn't stay in the hospital; I did not have money; we did not have insurance. What I got was just myself. That was all.

I came home and asked myself: if I die I will die. But one thing I want to know before I die. Does God really exist? Is God alive? If God is alive, that will be fine even if I die because I will go to God. But I wasn't sure! So I kind of waged a war against God! I decided to fast until I got to find out whether God is alive or not.

The first day passed. I did not eat anything. All I did was just pray. I prayed for 4 to 5 hours. Second day passed. I only drank water. I prayed all day in the church from morning to evening. The third day came-- still in the church praying all day. And then something happened!

While I was praying out loud The Holy Spirit came down upon me pouring into my heart. I just could not resist it; I was just overwhelmed by the power of the Spirit. I cried and cried and cried. After a couple of hours of crying, I felt so great. I felt like all my sins were completely taken away. I felt my whole body anointed by the fiery spirit of God.

From then on, my prayer changed from asking and confronting God to praising and thanking God. My prayers turned into singing and my singing went on for a couple of hours. No explanation was needed. I became convinced of the presence of God with me. I just could not handle the joy and excitement. I really felt that I was the happiest person in the whole world.

The following day, I saw the color of my urine change; my body started recovering completely in a week. That was almost 29 years ago. Since then I have never had a doubt about God.

God is not only alive; He also hears and answers our prayers. He cares about us. He helps us with specific needs.

I am telling you this story only for one reason: I want to point you to Jesus, the Lamb of God. I just want to be a small finger that is used to direct you to God. I know who I am and I know why I am standing before you.

I have been called by God to share with you how much I have been loved by God. I am here to tell you how much God loves you too. It does not matter how much we know the Bible or how many years we went to church, the bottom line is we have to be baptized by the Holy Spirit. From my own experiences, our sins are taken away when we meet Jesus through the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit not only forgives us from our sins; He empowers us to live a victorious life; God does not want us to fail; He wants us to succeed; God wants us to be a blessing to Him.

If you read the book of Acts, there are stories of people who were already baptized by the water but did never even know about the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:16; 18:25). But when they prayed hard seeking earnestly for this gift of the Spirit, they not only received it but also boldly went out to proclaim about Jesus.

The Bible is about those whose lives got transformed by this amazing grace. It is full of the witnesses of those men and women; Jews and Gentiles; the rich and the poor; the high and the low; and the learned and not-learned.

God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that *whoever, whoever, whoever* believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. (John 3:16)

In today's text, John the Baptist points his disciples to Jesus. Upon meeting Jesus personally, Andrew goes out and points his brother Simon to Jesus. Upon meeting Jesus, Simon gets a new name, Peter. That means Simon's life changed; he got a new life through Jesus Christ.

God calls us out of his love and changes our lives.
God calls us out of his love and gives us new directions.
God uses people to point us to Jesus.

People need Jesus. The world needs Jesus more than ever before. Jesus is the Lamb of God who came down to take away our sins. He came to us to save us. He came to give us life. He came to die so that we may live. Because of Jesus, there is hope; there is future; there is eternal life.

God is calling us to go out into the world and share this good news. We cannot leave the world the way it is. God calls us to be a strong community, community of hope, community of love, and community of witness.

With God's help, we want to be God's fingers that point the world to God in Jesus. May God bless and strengthen us so that we become a faithful community of witness. Amen.