

Come and See
John 1: 29-42
Jon Frost

On New Year's Day in an otherwise quite forgettable game between the Eagles and the Saints, a man in the stands collapsed and stopped breathing. Immediate medical intervention was crucial. Miraculously, two highly qualified individuals emerged to administer life saving CPR. One, a nurse named Natalie Spencer; and the other an emergency medicine doctor, Dr. Vincent Basile. There would have been no way of knowing they were equipped for that moment, given the way they blended in with everyone on that particular day, nurse Natalie in full Eagles gear and Dr. Basile in full Mummer attire. But as breath returned to the unconscious man and color to his face, every witness to the event had no doubt this was exactly who needed to show up in a very "only in Philly" kind of way.

From the prologue that begins John's Gospel, there is a sense that when Jesus comes on the scene, he will be hard to recognize. He will blend in. The gospel writer writes, "He was in the world, and the world came into being through him, yet the world did not know him." The people were waiting, and in a particularly focused way, John the Baptist was waiting for the light coming into the world as the prologue says. John's role was to be a witness to testify to that light. He spoke openly about one who would come, one who was greater than him because he was before John. About this one John said he wasn't even worthy to untie the straps of his sandals. And yet, as much as John was looking for him, two different times he says, "I myself did not know him." At first.

But then he saw it. He witnessed Jesus' baptism. Unlike the other gospel accounts which relay the events of Jesus' baptism as a narrative, here we have John recalling what took place. This is what he saw: the Spirit of God descended from heaven like a dove and remained on Jesus. This was the sign. He for whom John had been waiting and preparing the way was here. He kind of can't contain his excitement.

The next day and the day after that, as soon as he sees Jesus, he announces for all to hear who Jesus is. First, he proclaims, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" The next day simply, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!" John is doing exactly what the beginning of John's gospel said he would - he is testifying to the light, witnessing to the one coming after him. After hearing his proclamation the two disciples who had been standing with John leave to follow Jesus. And without us even noticing it John the Baptist just sort of unceremoniously departs the narrative. That's it.

This really struck me. I mean, discipleship was no casual half hearted arrangement. They spent significant time together. John would have invested a great deal in those two. Was he at all disheartened that they so quickly up and left? John is asked, essentially, that very question in chapter 3. He is asked, "Rabbi, that Jesus fella who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you testified, here he is baptizing, and all are going to him." John answered, "You yourselves are my witnesses that I said, 'I am not the Messiah, but I have been sent ahead of him. 'He who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom who stands and hears him rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. For this reason my joy has been fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease."

John never wavers from his vocation, which is simply to point others to Jesus. That's it. But I guess it isn't just his vocation. In a way it's all of our vocation, we who would follow Jesus. It is the mark of all faithful Christian ministry and how sad, tragic, and harmful the results can be when it becomes about us, our success, our reputations. We are called to point people to Jesus. He must increase, but we must decrease. The focus of the passage shifts from John's testimony about Jesus to Jesus and the disciples who are now following him.

There's an exchange of seemingly straightforward questions but this is the Gospel of John and there's almost always layers of meaning even in the most simple exchange. "What are you looking for?," Jesus asks them. Do you know that in the gospels Jesus asks 307 questions? He's asked 183 questions of which he only answers 3. There's something about the open ended space of a good question that Jesus just loves. A good question can cut through the surface and get at what's going on at a deeper level.

"Where are you staying?," they reply. What are the accommodations like as one of your disciples? Probably means more than that. Who are you aligned with? What will it cost to follow you? To which Jesus replies, "Come and see." Being a disciple of Jesus is not a program one can download in advance. Being a disciple is synonymous with going on the journey of discipleship with Jesus, inviting others to come and see along the way. What do the disciples do after Jesus says "come and see?" The very next words are "they came and saw" and they remained with Jesus.

And then Andrew, who was one of the two who left John to follow Jesus, replicates this "come and see" method and finds his brother Simon and brings him to Jesus, who then proceeds to give Simon a new name - Peter. Jesus is forming a new people, reorienting the family of God around himself. In this short passage we see the shape of Jesus' story that will play out in the subsequent pages of the gospel. We see his baptism and the descending of the Spirit, the beginning of his ministry and calling of the first disciples. We see transformation occur as they respond to Jesus' invitation to come and see. The title lamb of God, found only here in John's Gospel, reminds us that the victory Jesus will win will come through his own suffering and death.

This is also the shape of the disciples' story into which we are invited. It begins with our baptism, in which we receive a new identity in Christ, shared with all of his disciples. This beginning foreshadows the end which is not just a dying, but a rising to new resurrection life. As we are on the way, may our lives point away from ourselves but rather to the one who gives us new life, Jesus Christ the lamb of God. May we hear Jesus' invitation to come and see and remain with him wherever we go and invite others to do the same. Amen.

Resources

Copenhaver, Martin B. *Jesus Is the Question: The 307 Questions Jesus Asked and the 3 He Answered*. Abingdon Press, 2014.

John Paul, 6abc. "Nurse, Doctor in Pink Mummies Costume Help Save Life during Philadelphia Eagles Game." *WHYY*, *WHYY*, 5 Jan. 2023, <https://whyy.org/articles/doctor-in-mummies-costume-philadelphia-eagles-game-saving-mans-life-mummer-saves-man/>.