

Grace to you and peace from God our Creator and the Lord Jesus Christ.

We're back to the first chapter of John this week in our Gospel reading – for the fourth time in this young church year. This chapter of John is so rich, that if you understand what John is alluding to here, this single chapter would almost be enough to get across everything you need to know about Jesus and what he means for your life. Almost. Of course I'm glad we have the rest of this Gospel, and I wouldn't want to do without it. But there is enough in this first chapter of John to spend a lifetime contemplating it. I'm going to cut right to the chase today and say that the story of John and Jesus in today's Gospel reading can be read as a synopsis of the entire life of a Christian. It also parallels the shape and trajectory of our worship service here each Sunday. Let's see if I can make that work for you.

This reading begins with John and his disciples. John has been baptizing and preparing the way for the arrival of God's Messiah to save the world. Now it's happening. "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" he says, pointing to Jesus who is passing by. There's a lot to talk about in what John means by calling Jesus the Lamb of God. It points to how John will later portray Jesus as the new Passover lamb whose death brings us life and freedom from all that enslaves us, not least of which is our captivity to sin that we confessed a few minutes ago. John's job is to witness to Jesus, to point to him, to let people know his significance for them. In our life of faith, someone did that for us. For most of us, I'm going to guess, it was our parents. But not for all of us. But whoever it was, someone introduced us to Jesus, brought us to be baptized, impressed upon us the importance of Jesus for our lives, what he has done for us through his death and resurrection, and what he continues to do by the Holy Spirit in our lives of faith. On most Sundays of the year we begin our services with the Brief Order of Confession and Forgiveness. The point of that is the same as the point of John's opening statement to his disciples, to let us know that in Jesus God is fixing what is broken in the world. It's almost like the overture to an opera, briefly sketching out what later gets developed more fully.

In this story, that introduction piques the interest of John's disciples in Jesus, and after this John recedes from the picture. They approach Jesus, and he asks them, "what are you looking for?" This is an important question. It's kind of like the question that Jesus asks his disciples in the other three Gospels, "Who do you [think] that I am?" And like the disciples in those Gospels, the disciples in John have different ideas about him. So, we're missing both the beginning and the end of this story in our reading today, but suffice it to say that they think he is either the Messiah, the Son of God, or a teacher. And their idea of who Jesus is probably has something to do with what they want from him. Calling him a teacher means they're looking for knowledge, answers to questions, maybe life lessons, or a philosophy of life. Calling him Messiah means they're looking for someone to free them from foreign occupation and restore the autonomy and independence of the people of Israel under their own king. Calling him Son of God was really pretty much the same thing, but in John's gospel it hints that he is no ordinary king, but actually God come to earth. And that means God is truly with them and on their side.

Jesus' question to John's disciples, who will soon be his own disciples, is also for us, his modern-day disciples. What is it you're looking for? Who do you think Jesus is? What do you want from him? There are a lot of different ways to answer that question, probably as many different answers as different people. Some of us are looking for a teacher, an approach to living that makes sense of the world around us and our place in it. Some of us are looking for help –

healing from illness, peace in the midst of chaos, security in the face of anxiety, a sense of connection in our loneliness, or meaning when life seems random or pointless. Still others are looking for a partner to advance our personal agendas, a way to happiness and success in life, at least as we define success.

Some of those who come to Jesus in John's Gospel will later give up on him. The same happens with those who are brought to Jesus in our own time. People do not always find what they're looking for in Jesus. And things can change over a person's lifetime. What was once compelling about Jesus no longer is. Or what once seemed objectionable or ridiculous suddenly becomes compelling in light of life experiences and circumstances.

Whatever we're looking for, John's opening statement about Jesus taking away the sin of the world is ultimately about life. John makes this clear both at the beginning and at the end of his Gospel. Jesus' coming into the world, his life, death, and resurrection, are all undertaken for this purpose: that we come to trust in him, and through that trusting have life. Whatever you're looking for, life is probably a part of the picture.

Another way of talking about this in John is "abiding" in Jesus. That becomes clearer in chapter 15 where Jesus compares himself to a vine and us to his branches. His point is that his life is ours when we "abide" in him, when we stay with him – or "live" *in* him, that might be even better. That word "abide" is all over our reading this morning, but it doesn't show through our English translation. It's the fault of our amazingly rich and complex English language that has so many more words than ancient Greek.

This "abiding" or "living" in Jesus also encompasses the whole of our worship service, but it is especially noticeable, I think, in the sacrament of Holy Communion. Each week as we take bread and wine into ourselves we are promised that this is Jesus truly present with and in us, his life joined to ours, and ours to his. But we also abide in Jesus by attending to God's word in scripture and proclamation, and by praying in Jesus' name for the church, the world, and for all in any need.

The disciples' time in Jesus' presence was life changing. It moved them to share what they had experienced with others, and to bring them into Jesus' presence. "We have found what we're looking for," they tell one another, "Come and see!"

And so it is meant to be for us. When, by God's grace and the power of the Holy Spirit, the faith that we're brought to takes hold in us, it changes our lives too. It becomes something we want to share with those we're close to, and those we encounter. We can't help it. And the liturgy is shaped to reflect that realization. After abiding in Jesus in Word and Sacrament, we are sent outside of these walls in the peace of Christ to share the gift of God's presence and to be instruments of God's love and blessing to all those we encounter.

So there it is, John's overture – the Christian life in a nutshell: being brought to Jesus, abiding in Jesus, and being compelled to share with others the life that is found in him. And you can think of what we do here every week in that light too. Think of this as the overture to your week, a way to frame your daily life. Christ is with you. His life is your life. And that life is light shining in the darkness, light that will not be overcome. May we trust the promise of that overture. And may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep our hearts and minds in the same Christ Jesus. Amen.