

**Sermon: 2021/01/26 (ALTERNATIVE - 3rd Sunday after Epiphany) -
*Isaiah 49:1-7; Psalm 27:1, 5-13; 1 Corinthians 1:10-18; &, John
1:35-42_BTR***

[Invite children to the front. Toy archery set; strips of paper w/ "GOD LOVES YOU" written on them, scotch-tape & a pen.]

Christ has done something *very* exciting for Christians.

He has given them a gift of *eternal* life.

But often we struggle to show and share that excitement with the people around us, right?

We tend to be quite timid don't we?

Reluctant.

If we share about God, we do so in small, quote voice; hesitatingly.

Like passing a note at school.

[Take out the first strip, show to children.]

How do you pass a note - a message - to someone when you're in class with them?

Do you *shout*?

And say, "HEY! [Name], I'VE GOT A MESSAGE FOR YOU!"

[Wait for response.]

No?

No, of course not.

You whisper.

And pass the message under the desk, in secret.

[Look nervous, fold the message, and pass it.]

But this is *not* how God wants us to share about His love for the world.

He wants us to "*boast*," and sing, and be dramatic and loud - to show how much there is to be thankful for!

Just consider how Isaiah is described:

as a bow and arrow(!), ready to shoot *sharp*, 'polished' arrows of "Good News" to all of his neighbors.

[Stick note to arrow with the scotch-tape, and fire it into the congregation.]

Let's pray:

Lord God, ..., in Jesus' name we pray, amen.

[Dismiss children.]

Allow me to paraphrase today's reading from *the Gospel of John*.

I don't doubt your intelligence or mean to imply that you weren't paying attention; the purpose for doing so will become clear:

So, John baptises his cousin, Jesus; announcing Him (to the assembled, bemused onlookers) as "the Lamb of God."

And then, as the "Synoptics" tell it - that's *Matthew, Mark and Luke*, away Jesus "flies" to confront and converse with the Devil for forty days of hardship and struggle.

But this is *not* what John the Evangelist remembered happening - not quite: Jesus does *not* immediately depart from that place for the Temptation in the wilderness.

Oh no.

Actually, He seems to...delay; to... *prevaricate*.

In fact, we are told, He was *still* by the River Jordan '[t]he next day' - and He hung around *long* enough for the Baptist to tell *another* crowd of repenters the *very* same thing.

Deja vu, right?

It's a bit weird.

Like when you say goodbye to someone, and hug them, and wish them well, and say you're going to miss them; and you part ways, *definitively*, only to *instantly* see each other again, and it feels awkward, doesn't it?

You're almost annoyed that they haven't just...disappeared.

It's like your farewell has been invalidated.

But you can't hug them again.

It'd feel fake; forced.

So why *does* Jesus linger having had this really big and public affirmation from John?

What was He waiting for?

After all, His baptism was like a coronation.

"In what sense?", you ask.

Let me explain: John the Baptist functioned as the Archbishop of Canterbury, placing an invisible, *spiritual* "crown" on Christ by calling Him out as 'the Son of God.'

That is, the prince; the "Son" of the "Lord of lords."

True, *heavenly* royalty.

Well, the thing is: one can't be crowned more than once.

It's a one-time-thing.
Once a king, always a king.
So, what's happening here?

I'll tell you who reaps the benefit of this repetition by John - from this emphasis on Jesus' unique identity as God's one-of-a-kind "servant"-sacrifice.

Look closely.

Who has the disciples at the beginning of this episode and who lacks them?

John.

John was the one with followers; admirers.

Jesus doesn't.

John is the one with a team; with allies - men he could count on.

Jesus is a loner.

The stranger.

The outsider.

The enigma.

But this is back-to-front.

Upside-down.

John himself says so.

And I think this is what makes him exceptional: an exemplar to you and me.

John was a sort of celebrity - "a big deal" - in Judea *and yet* he was *actively* trying to *displace* himself from being the center-of-attention.

His *whole* ministry and the *whole* of his life were about saying, "don't look at me; don't invest your hope and trust and dreams in me - I'll squander those things and disappoint you: *rather(!)*, give them - your hope and trust and dreams - to the one who's sandals I'm not even fit to tie."

We - me - love to be the focus of others' attention.

To have others lavish us with gifts and love and compliments and interest; but

John says give *all* that to God!

He's the *only* who deserves it.

And you will reap *such* a dividend when you do.

Thus, seeing Jesus, the one who is, in fact, the center of the universe - its creator and sustainer, John was *excited* to retire;

to "pass the buck;"

to step aside for the one who would *literally* change the world whereas he could only fantasise about doing such.

What happens, therefore?

John's disciples abandon him!

Andrew, Simon - they transfer their allegiance.

They give up whatever it is they had going on with the Baptist - probably living in tents; bivouacs out in the Judean wilderness; roughing it with him, and go and "rough it" with the Savior instead, following Him around Galilee and Samaria.

And notice: there's no vacillation by that pair.

No "foot-dragging."

They don't try and keep one foot in John's camp and another with Jesus.

There's not some third way of "fence-sitting."

And we're called to the same.

Now, in all honesty, Andrew and Simon *had* to choose:

John was based in the "Deep South" of the country, near to the Dead Sea.

Indeed, if you were to go to where he was carrying out his rite of baptism, you would find yourself not even in Israel!

It was *way* out in the desert in what is now the Arab Hashemite Kingdom.

Jesus, however, had souls to save and "souls" don't tend to be in such hot, arid, inhospitable, lonely places; but in towns and cities.

And, *specifically*, Jesus felt called to Capernaum and the villages around there, which was in the north.

Andrew and Simon, therefore, couldn't avoid making a choice:

They *had* to.

Now, you and I, we don't *necessarily* find ourselves "backed into a corner" in the same way:

To choose Jesus over and above someone - *something* - else; a competitor.

Indeed, for many of us, we simply "add" Him - some weekly worship; some occasional service in His name - and carry on with *everything* else we were doing as before.

But, you see, as we reflect on His teaching - especially His teaching in places like "the Sermon on the Mount," (which we're going to hear next week), it begins to "dawn" on us, slowly, that we are, in fact, called to, in *many* ways, *radically* re-think what otherwise, as we look around, might be taken as "normal" human behaviour.

And to choose between conformity to the *status quo* or conformity to the Kingdom, which are, *fundamentally*, very much in tension - as if two, entirely different (geographical) regions.

Let us pray, then, that we will, like Andrew and Simon, make *decisive*, unequivocal choices for Christ and Christendom.