

Suttons Bay Congregational Church  
John 1:29-42

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Jesus the Lamb of God

29The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! 30This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'

31I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel."

32Then John gave this testimony: "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. 33I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' 34I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God."

Jesus' First Disciples

35The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. 36When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God!"

37When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. 38Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, "What do you want?"

They said, "Rabbi" (which means Teacher), "where are you staying?"

39"Come," he replied, "and you will see."

So they went and saw where he was staying, and spent that day with him. It was about the tenth hour.

40Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. 41The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ). 42And he brought him to Jesus.

Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas" (which, when translated, is Peter).

Why? All I can ask is why? Why did the people flock to John the Baptist? What was going on in the villages along the banks of the Jordan River some two thousand odd years ago that caused people to turn out to hear the preaching of, and be baptized by, this wild and wooly, camel-hair-wearing, locust-and-honey-eating, non-too-polite or proper prophet? After all, he's not like many of the smarmy would-be television prophets of today who tell you that God wants you to be rich and prosperous. We can stomach smarmy when a person is telling us that life's gonna be easy as pie if only we'll make a two hundred dollar donation to his ministry in exchange for which not only will God make us rich, but we'll also receive a commemorative porcelain lamb statue in the mail within 14 business days. I can see how that is tempting. Folks are looking for a way out and here is someone in a designer suit with well-coifed hair offering one, an easy one, with a relatively small price tag. But that wasn't John. John was making tough demands of the people—repent, make straight the way of the Lord. In other words, no more screwing around, no more cheating or stealing, no more doing the stuff you know you shouldn't have been doing in the first place but have been doing anyway because you thought you could get away it. Knock it off. Because soon and very soon someone greater than I is coming and you—yes YOU—better be ready.

And that could be precisely why the people came to John. Even though his message was bitter medicine to swallow, he offered people hope of something greater than himself, he told them that life now was not as good as it could get. Indeed, he let them know that the messiah was coming. The messiah—the Christ—a savior. A secular scholar studying this time in history writes, "A widely recognized idea among Jews in the first century B.C. was the belief in a Messiah, a redeemer chosen by God to liberate Israel from foreign rule. In the days of the Messiah, it was predicted that Israel would be free, the exiles would return, and the Jews would be blessed with peace, unity, and prosperity.<sup>1</sup> And if ever there was something these folks needed, it was a messiah. And so if that hope for a messiah, for something better, came to them in the form of a wild, wooly, smelly and abrasive prophet, so be it, because they were in sore need of saving.

The Jewish people had been living under Roman occupation. They paid taxes, often in exorbitant amounts, to a foreign government and got little in return. Poor people and others on the margins suffered the most from this

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<sup>1</sup> Marvin Perry, *Western Civilization, Ideas, Politics, and Society*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Houghton Mifflin, 150-167.

unjust system. However, Jews of wealth and position were not exempt from suffering. Many of them had been displaced from their homes and families were divided when loved ones were sent away to distant corners of the Roman Empire—this was Rome’s attempt to keep the Jews in limbo, unable to organize against the Roman intruders. And to make matters worse, Jews themselves were not in agreement, there were factions and divisions—Pharisees, the Saducees, the Zealots—all of them Jews--it must have seemed like any kind of unity among themselves, let alone having the power to organize against the Romans, was impossible. And into this shadowy place of hopelessness and doubt comes John the Baptist promising something different, promising change.

Any one who has turned on a television or a radio in the past two weeks is well-acquainted with promises of change. All of the major Presidential candidates are claiming a platform of change. And in an interview with NBC just this past week, even President Bush said, “If I were running for office at this point, I’d be saying, ‘Vote for me. I’m gonna be an agent of change.’” Obviously the promise of making change sells—it sold 2000 years ago and it sells today. But really, the ability to make change has little to do with the political leader, because regardless of how good that leader is, he or she is still a human being and is the leader of human beings, in all of our brokenness and ineptitude. And as such, the headlines don’t change—people die, the innocent are found guilty, the guilty go free, defenseless children are hurt, marriages crumble, the environment is polluted, people fall ill, friends betray, addictions consume . . . A leader, no matter what the party affiliation, no matter the skills or talents, no leader can change the human condition.

Except, of course, the leader who came on the scene—the leader to whom John the Baptist pointed and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! 30This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'" Jesus came on the scene and things began to change. There was Bartimeus who was blind, he met the Messiah on the road and Jesus spit into the dirt, made a paste to place on Bartimeus’ eyes and for the first time since the day he was born, Bartimeus could see. And there was the woman who was bleeding, weak and alone, having been ostracized from her community because of her illness. She reached out and touched the hem of Jesus’ robe and finally, the bleeding stopped. And there was Lazarus, dead in his grave clothes, and Jesus raised him up, resurrected him back to life. Jesus brought real change. And apart from these miracles, there was the change, the transformation that took place in people’s hearts just because they knew Jesus and because Jesus knew them. Think of the men in this morning’s gospel account—what must it have felt like when they asked Jesus where he was staying and instead of replying, “At the Marriott Galilee” and walking away he said, “Come and you will see.”

Now to understand how radical Jesus’ response is, let’s take a moment to discover more about the role of a rabbi in his society. It was no small thing for a rabbi to invite someone to be his follower, to be his apprentice. It was only the best of the best, the cream of the crop, who were invited to follow a rabbi. Pastor, teacher, and preacher Rob Bell writes the following about the student/rabbi relationship. “When a student applied to a rabbi to be one of his [disciples], he was desiring to take that rabbi’s yoke upon him. He wanted to learn to do what the rabbi did. So when a student came to the rabbi and said, “I want to follow you,” the rabbi wanted to know a few things: Can this student do what I do? Can this kid spread my yoke? Can this kid be like me? Does this kid have what it takes? The rabbi would then question the student . . . the rabbi would grill this teenage kid because he wanted to know if this kid could do what he did . . . [I]f the rabbi believed that this kid did have what it took, he would say, “Come, follow me.”<sup>2</sup>

But Jesus, Jesus changed all of that. Jesus, whom these young fellows called Rabbi, must have shocked the young men when he asked no questions, made no demands, and didn’t give them a pop quiz on the history of ancient of Israel. He skipped the testing, the evaluation, the critique and went straight to, “Come, follow me.” Now this just

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<sup>2</sup> Rob Bell, *Velvet Elvis*, Zondervan, 2005, 129-130.

wasn't done, a disciple had to earn his place, to prove his worthiness. And here was Jesus, handing out discipleships like they grew on trees. Talk about change.

But the change wasn't so much in the rabbinic system of discipleship as it was in the hearts and minds of the people Jesus called. And so it was that Andrew and Peter became Jesus' disciples. No longer were they bound to their former lives, their former destinies, their former selves. Suddenly, all the world was new, filled with opportunities and possibilities about which these guys would previously have never even dreamed.

And here's what's incredible, here's what we celebrate today and each and every day, nothing has changed about that change—Jesus is still inviting us, “Come, Follow Me.” There are no prerequisites, no resumes, no previous experience necessary. Jesus invites us, us—you and me with all of our hang-ups, anxieties, issues, anger, grudges, brokenness, inability, and exhaustion—Jesus calls us to follow him. Jesus calls us to be a part of this thing that is so much bigger than ourselves. Jesus is the agent of change—not some person whose image we see on a TV commercial who, at the end, comes over in a sound bite saying, “And I approve this message.” Jesus is the agent of change we so desperately need and indeed is the only one with the power to change and transform our hearts. Jesus brings us hope. Jesus brings us peace. Jesus brings us joy. Jesus brings us love. Jesus brings us change and makes us part of this magnificent thing we call the kingdom of God. Jesus makes us a part of it all. No one needs to be left on the outside looking in. Because, no one isn't smart enough. No one isn't young enough. No one isn't thin enough. No one isn't rich enough. No one isn't experienced enough. No one isn't good enough. No one isn't—NO ONE isn't called. Jesus said it to Andrew and Peter. Jesus said it to Mary and Martha. Jesus said it to Martin Luther King, Jr. and to Mother Theresa. Jesus said it to hundreds of millions who have gone before us and Jesus says it to you, yes to you and to me. Jesus says, “Come, follow me.” Thanks be to God for the call. Thanks be to God for making us a part of it all. Thanks be to God for this great blessing we celebrate today and every day—the blessing of hearing for ourselves those three little words that make huge change, “Come, Follow Me.”