

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: John 1:29-42

“Follow Me”

If this Sunday's Gospel sounds a lot like last Sunday's Gospel – there is a purpose to it. The Baptism of Jesus is so very, very important that it bears spending time with. The Baptism of each one of us bears spending time with. If you recall the words were: *“As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”*” (Matthew 3:16-17) How absolutely remarkable - the sky above Him was opened – and there, for the first time we are presented with the incredible presence of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. As I said last week – that was the start of something very big!

In John's Gospel– John the Baptist proclaims Jesus to be the *“Lamb of God.”* Many of us have heard and are familiar with the term *“Lamb of God”* – as a matter of fact – we sing it and this is significant. John the Baptist humbly was pointing away from himself, trying to defer all of the credit people were trying to give him and to put it where it belonged - pointing towards Jesus – specifically as God's sacrificial Lamb. Right here – he tells us not only who Jesus is – but he tells us why Jesus must die such a sacrificial death on the cross – for the sins of the whole world. That is a wonder in itself! Only God could pay this perfect price – so that He could provide perfect justice – and free each one of us from our sins – as the ultimate atonement.

John the Baptist was an outspoken man who was not afraid to speak his mind. He was not afraid to tell people what he witnessed; to what he saw and heard – that Jesus as the Messiah would baptize with the Holy Spirit. Most Jewish groups in Jesus' time believed that the Holy Spirit was not as active in prophetic inspiration as in the Old Testament. They felt that He went to sleep because for many years – from the Old Testament prophets (Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi) there was a dead time – God was not speaking to His people. For many of the people who listened to John's claim that through Jesus the Holy Spirit was present and that Jesus would be baptizing people with the Holy Spirit, it must mean that the Messiah had come or was near.

Today, we read that two of John the Baptist's followers heard his announcement of Jesus as the Lamb of God – and they left John and they followed Jesus. John's Gospel identifies one of them as someone that we know and love very dearly, Andrew, on whom this church is named. He is the brother of Simon Peter – and we can assume that the other one is the author of this Gospel and that is John. He humbly doesn't reveal who he is as the other man. As a matter of fact – if you go through John's Gospel – he never points to himself. He will always refer to himself as the disciple whom Jesus loved – all the way through John chapter 21. The connection is made and the groundwork is laid for the forming of the Twelve. That is what Jesus is about to start doing. These two young men came to Jesus and asked Him where He was staying. Apparently they wanted to hang around Him and learn from Him. Jesus told them, *“Come,” He replied, “and you will see.” So they went and saw where He was staying,*

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*and spent that day with Him.” (John 1:39) With this, Jesus went about gathering the other ten. “The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, “We have found the Messiah” (that is, the Christ). And 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). (On Wednesday nights we were talking about the names of the apostles and how they were transliterated to English, and how Simon is *Shimon*, Peter is Greek is *Petra*, and the Aramaic is *Cephas*. Many people will pronounce it as ‘see-fas’ but it is “kay-fas” which was the pronunciation at the time. That is what is translated for Peter as rock, or boulder or stone.) The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, “Follow me.” Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. Philip found Nathanael and told him, “We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote--Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.” (John 1:41-45*

Most people in the Galilee and surrounding regions depended on salted fish, wheat and barley for food. The typical fish from the Sea of Galilee were large carp and the fish would be dried, salted or pickled to preserve them. I don't think I am going to hear anyone saying 'yum' at this point. There were two main occupations in the area – farmers and fishermen. Fishermen were an integral part of the economy of the Sea of Galilee and made a pretty good living, far better than the large numbers of farmers who worked the land throughout much of the Roman Empire. They would cast large nets made of rope or cords woven from flax, papyrus or hemp and as you can imagine, they would reap a pretty nice payday with a large haul of fish. James and John, following Jesus' call on their lives, left behind a pretty good job and more than that, they left behind their father, Zebedee and their family business. James and John were known as the sons of Zebedee or the sons of thunder. This was a pretty big deal, which could bring upon them scorn and dishonor in their community. We, since we know the whole story, can see that they felt a higher calling on their lives – and they would become “fishers of men,” It is pretty clear that when Jesus finds all of His Apostles – He gives them a new vocation. They don't worry about what is back at home or their occupation. Their one task is to follow Jesus and to learn from Him.

So much is going on in the life of Our Lord, as He has begun gathering the twelve, and then as Jesus returned to the Galilee region after His baptism and the temptation by Satan – He went to Nazareth – where He grew up. Of course, there is a nearby town called Cana that Jesus, His mother Mary, and His apostles go to attend a wedding, but that is another story for another day.

I want to share with you an account that took place in Luke's Gospel in chapter 4, which gives us the account of Jesus' visit to Nazareth, and on the Shabbat to the synagogue – and what transpired. This is so important in the ministry and work of Jesus. The people knew the scrolls, the prophets and they knew Isaiah. Today, we had the reading from Isaiah 49 and he is telling them that the Messiah is going to change the way things are done. He is going to be meeting with and gathering in Gentiles. Oh No – not Gentiles! Isaiah talks about this throughout. Jesus is called to read – just like Jay this morning. Jay had his readings all laid out for him – Jesus

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was handed a scroll from Isaiah. Luke's Gospel says: "*The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."* Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he began by saying to them, "**Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.**" (Luke 4:17-21) If you recall from our reading from Isaiah 49 this morning, he prophesied that the year of the Lord's favor was coming, and that it would be not only for the Jews, but for the Gentiles. Could you imagine being told "*Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing*"?

The people of Nazareth were stunned at this – oh, there might have been nervous laughter, but they were angry. It turns out that many wanted to physically push Jesus over the cliff at the edge of town. What is even more remarkable is that as proof positive that God's Holy Spirit is in charge – Jesus simply walked past them. It was not His time to be harmed, it was not His time to be sacrificed – for there was much more that needed to be done in the life and ministry of this young man, Jesus of Nazareth.

So, why did they get so upset? Well, Jesus would go on to make points about the great prophets Elijah and Elisha, and so He identified Himself with the prophets. This was more than the people could handle – after all they watched Him grow up. Elijah was sent to help a widow – but not a Jewish one. Elisha healed a leper – and the leper was the commander of the Gentile enemy army. That's what did it. That is what turned them on Him. It wasn't Jesus' saying that "*today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing*" that drove them with anger and hostility. It was because of what they heard in Isaiah, and not only Isaiah 61, but also in Isaiah 49 that talked about the year of the Lord's favor and it was going to be helping the Gentiles. Jesus was saying that God was rescuing BOTH Jew and Gentile. These people were waiting for God to liberate THEM from the oppression of their pagan enemies, the Gentiles, and not for their enemies to be saved too. Why would God forgive them?

This was just the beginning of Jesus' ministry. There were three more years of work, of preaching, teaching, examples, of signs, of miracles and wonders that would culminate finally at the cross – and then at the empty tomb. Thank you Jesus, He doesn't stop there. Like He said to Philip in verse 42 of today's Holy Gospel - "*follow Me*" - and like He said to Peter and John in John 21 – He told them to follow Him as well. He says to each one of us – "*follow Me.*" Oh, that we would hear His voice and we would simply do what He says.