

Sermon: John 1:29-42 (Epiphany 2A)
Christ Church Riverdale, 16 January 2011
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John 1:19-42 This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, ‘Who are you?’ He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, ‘I am not the Messiah.’ And they asked him, ‘What then? Are you Elijah?’ He said, ‘I am not.’ ‘Are you the prophet?’ He answered, ‘No.’ Then they said to him, ‘Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?’ He said, ‘I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, “Make straight the way of the Lord”’, as the prophet Isaiah said. Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. They asked him, ‘Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?’ John answered them, ‘I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal.’ This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing. The next day he saw Jesus coming towards him and declared, ‘Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, “After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.” I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel.’ And John testified, ‘I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, “He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.” And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God.’ The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, ‘Look, here is the Lamb of God!’ The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, ‘What are you looking for?’ They said to him, ‘Rabbi’ (which translated means Teacher), ‘where are you staying?’ He said to them, ‘Come and see.’ They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o’clock in the afternoon. One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. He first found his brother Simon and said to him, ‘We have found the Messiah’ (which is translated Anointed). He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, ‘You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas’ (which is translated Peter). [NRSV]

Today when we hear that somebody is a follower of a person, we're likely to think of Twitter, where somebody who subscribes to a person's tweets is called a follower. I don't do Twitter myself, but as I understand it, you can be the follower of as many people as you want and see as many updates as they choose to provide. A recent analysis of the content of tweets described the largest category--40 per cent, as "pointless babble."¹ But today we've heard about Jesus' first followers in John's Gospel, and it's quite the contrast. Following Jesus for the first two disciples means not following someone else--not following John--any more. And although Jesus often speaks in sayings short enough to be written in the 140 characters of a tweet, you can bet that the largest category of what Jesus has to say is not pointless babble--not unless you're Christopher Hitchens, but if you were, you wouldn't be here!

Jesus gets right to the point. "What are you looking for?" he asks the two disciples of John the Baptist who start to follow him. Not, "Thanks for joining me," or "Tell me a little about yourselves," but, "What are you looking for?" "Yes, John has told you that I am the Lamb

¹ Kelly, Ryan, ed (August 12, 2009). "[Twitter Study – August 2009](#)" (PDF). *Twitter Study Reveals Interesting Results About Usage*. San Antonio, Texas: Pear Analytics. Retrieved Jun 3, 2010. Cited in "Twitter" entry on Wikipedia.org, retrieved January 15, 2011.

of God, but what are *you* looking for?" Maybe they're taken aback by the question, because their response isn't an answer: "Rabbi, where are you staying?" But even though it isn't an answer, they don't fail the test. "Come and see," Jesus says. "See for yourself," we might translate. Here's the big difference between followers on Twitter and followers of Jesus: To be a follower of Jesus doesn't just mean keeping track of what he says on your smartphone, it means getting up and going with him, seeing for yourself!

Notice how Jesus gets his first disciples. Not one word of trying to persuade anyone to follow, but questions and challenges: "What are you looking for?" "Come and see." "You will be called Peter." The persuasion comes from others: John the Baptist: "Look, here is the Lamb of God!" Andrew to his brother: "We have found the Messiah!" I've often wondered how it felt to be Andrew. I get the sense that Simon Peter was his big brother--he's bigger in personality at least if not older. Peter becomes the bigshot, the number one disciple of Jesus, leader of the Twelve, while Andrew, who convinces Peter to follow Jesus, we hardly hear about in the gospels. But even though we aren't Simon Peters, we are sitting in this room because we've had an Andrew in our life, or maybe a number of Andrews--people who have led us to Jesus and helped us understand who he is. Let's give thanks for the Andrews in our lives, for the gift they have given us by bringing us to Jesus! And . . . let's remember that we all can be Andrews to other people--he had no theological training that we know of. The only thing that qualified him was that he followed Jesus himself. For some people, the only Bible they've ever read is what they see in our lives, the daily decision we make of how to follow Jesus!

And following is all about trust. More than 20 years ago I made my first visit to New York City and on the way home I made my first visit to the Port Authority Bus Terminal to get out to Newark and catch my plane. Here I was--product of a small Georgia town and never been in a city larger than Atlanta. Port Authority was a much scarier place back then, and confusing enough to get around that there were people who made their living by leading you to your bus for a buck or two; and carrying your bags if you'd let them. Somehow--I have no idea how--but somehow one of these folks recognized small-town Georgia me as having trouble finding my bus! "Where are you trying to go?" And he led me off in completely the opposite direction from where I thought my bus was. Now I didn't fully trust this guy, and didn't let him carry my bag. But I also didn't want to miss my bus and then my plane, so I *had* to follow him, *had* to go with him, *had* to come and see. And no, he didn't get me worse lost and ask for more money; he led me right to my bus, which I wouldn't have found without him. Having the directions explained to me wouldn't have been nearly as effective as just following.

In the world you and I live in we don't like to follow so much. We don't think we need it, because we have GPS and Mapquest. Maybe there's even an App now that helps you find your way around Port Authority! But in the life of faith, having someone to follow is far better than having information. Explaining and leading are different things. Jesus *leads* us on a way of life. Following means our leader goes through what we go through. Jesus doesn't get directees, but followers. Following means that when circumstances change you don't have to scrap the whole plan but can be led in the right direction in response to the new situation.

And most importantly, I believe, following Jesus means going somewhere you might not imagine and might not even want to go! If you had asked small-town Georgia me in 1988 if I

wanted to move to New York, I would have said no thanks--it's a nice place to visit. You couldn't have told me that by following Jesus I'd end up living here . . . and loving it! Following Jesus has challenged me to grow in ways I wouldn't have chosen and given me gifts I never knew I wanted. Unlike small-town Georgia me, all alone in 1988 having to decide whether to trust someone where to lead, you and I have each other, we have our sisters and brothers in Christ. We have each other's encouragement and prayers as Jesus leads us on a journey that has plenty of unexpected turns, but on a journey that ultimately leads us home.

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