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The Second Sunday after the Epiphany, John 1:29-42

A Mystery that Takes Time

“A fish doesn’t know it’s wet” the saying goes. It’s hard to see when the water in which we swim is so familiar. Whether you have grown up as part of a Christian community all your life or being part of a Christian community is new for you, we all see what’s next in line. Christmas gifts and decorations appeared the day after Halloween and by December 26, these items were on sale and replaced with New Year’s Resolutions gear. Given the all or nothing resolutions we tend to make, being consumed Valentine’s Day candies and cards seems fine.

For some, the calendar of the Church Year is familiar, too. In the season called Advent, we prepare our hearts for Jesus’ return. We celebrate Christmas for 12 days. Then, comes the Epiphany, when Jesus was made manifest as God, as the King of Kings, to the magi, or wise men, who opened their treasure chests and offered him their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Why twelve days of Christmas? The wise men from the East took time to travel. Twelve days of Christmas seems long enough, so why the 8 Sunday season after the Epiphany, twice the length of Advent?¹ The light and love of the incarnation is a mystery that takes time to soak in, to become the water in which we swim.

Last Sunday on the first Sunday of the Epiphany we celebrated the feast of the Baptism of Our Lord. We heard the account of Jesus’ baptism shared in the Gospel according to Matthew. We pondered Jesus’ telling John the Baptist in so many words, “Yes, baptize me. Share your gift with me. Your bearing witness to me is necessary for us to do what’s right” (Matthew 3:15). Today, the second Sunday after the Epiphany, we hear the account of Jesus’ baptism according to John’s Gospel, not John the Baptist but John the Evangelist, the beloved disciple.

This account is a first person reflection about the baptism after the baptism has happened. John the Baptist saw Jesus walking towards him and declared, “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This man is the pre-existent One, the outside of time and in time. I baptized so that he might be revealed. I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. The one who sent me to baptize with water told me that this is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit. I have seen and I have testified that Jesus is the Son of God.” The next day John again was

¹ “In many churches, this end is performed symbolically but definitely by moving the magi and their gifts to the manger, after having held them back for the twelve days of Christ. Children often ask about this delay: Why wait? Of course, there is a practical response: the magi has to travel a long distance to Bethlehem, so it would be wrong to place them at the manger too soon after the birth...These practical and theological answers often suffice for inquiring children, but will they satisfy an especially inquisitive child—and are they theologically sufficient?” is an important question raised in David Toole’s *Theological Perspective of John 1:29-42* on page 262 in *Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary: Feasting on the Word, Year A, Volume I* (page 260-265.) Toole ends up where I end up—wait “to hear what Jesus has to say in the coming weeks before we answer his question [what are you looking for?] and finish the celebration we started on Christmas” (264).

standing with two of John's disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!"

The two disciples heard him 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, "Teacher, where are you staying? Where do you live? What and whom do you see?" Jesus replied, "Come and see for yourselves" They came and saw where he lived and moved and had his being, and they abided with him all into the late hours of the night. One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. Andrew found his brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the One for whom we have hoped and waited for so long.

Jesus asked them. Jesus asks you and me, "What are you looking for?" I was tempted to have us answer this question today, but this query may seem too familiar and the truth takes time to be revealed. So we begin with another question, one that can help us see the water in which we actually swim, not the ways we hope to see and be. Before we respond to Jesus' question, "What are you looking for?" I suggest we ask ourselves, "What do we actually see?"

Now is the time to be conscious of what we allow in our line of vision, our flow of information, our thoughts, our feelings, our decisions. Do we see opinions as facts? Do we see difference and look the other direction? Do we see others only in comparison to what we think they take from us? Do we see others in the midst of our daily life and work? Do we look strangers and friends in the eyes and see our common humanity? Do we see our assumptions as others' intentions?

Now is the time to pay attention to what and who we see, not the way we wish we saw God, one another, and ourselves. If we do not consciously begin here, we will unconsciously block some of the light we long to comprehend. We will cut ourselves off from some of the light and love for which we have been waiting.

Life is full, the water is wide, and we can legitimately say, "I don't have time for this." And yet, as we must take time for such conscious reflection in order to have the vision, the consciousness of God with us. In April of 1963, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote to white moderate Christian clergy in response to a statement they had written calling his activities "unwise and untimely." In his written response while confined in the Birmingham city jail, says, "time itself is neutral it can be used either destructively or constructively." He continues

More and more I feel that the people of ill will have used time much more effectively than the people of good will. We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the hateful word and actions of the bad people but for the appalling silence of the good people. Human progress never roll in on wheel s of inevitability; it comes through the tireless efforts of [humans] willing to be co workers with God and without this hard work, time itself becomes as ally of the forces of social stagnation. We must use time creatively, in the knowledge that the time is always ripe to do right.²

Time is neutral; our vision is not. We may think we are looking for a Savior but we look for a divine on-call butler. We may think we are looking for the Lamb of God but

² https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles_Gen/Letter_Birmingham.html "Letter from a Birmingham Jail"

we look for a fierce lion. We may think we are looking for the whole story but we look for a sliver of truth.

This is why we need the long season of Epiphany. A-ha moments “Oh, this is the light I was made to follow, this is the love I was made to share, this is who I was after all along” seem to happen suddenly, yet they are part of a process of growing consciousness. In the six Sundays to follow, Jesus will share who, what, and how God sees in his teaching referred to as the Sermon on the Mount. Before we answer Jesus’ question, “Who are you looking for?” let’s ask ourselves “what do we see?”

The celebration of God with us we began at Christmas takes time. As we follow, as we listen, God help us, our vision will change. We will do more than just keep swimming. We will soak in the mystery and such open vision, such gracious possibility, such abundant love, will become the water in which we swim. *Amen.*