

SERMON
First Lutheran Church
Aitkin, Minnesota

John 1:29-42
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January 19, 2014

There were a lot of reports and letters to finish this week. I had visited with quite a few different folks. It was Wednesday afternoon and I slipped into a darkened sanctuary to sit down and reflect with God a little bit before hopefully getting started on my sermon work. Just a few seconds after I had gotten settled into one of the front row chairs, I spotted a small rectangle of light, maybe two feet wide by three or four feet high. It appeared at the edge of the front wall of the sanctuary. It had a thin cross etched across its face. Immediately I determined that somebody must be dropping off one of the coffee house kids and it was their headlights shining through the front doors of the church. As I watched, that cross centered rectangle slowly slid across the front wall and then stopped exactly over our own sanctuary cross. **"Humph, that's interesting,"** I thought. In a moment it just disappeared.

I forgot all about that little incident until the next afternoon when during staff devotions we were talking about looking for signs of God in our everyday world. I mentioned it to my co-workers and one or two of them wondered if that experience had not been a sign/visit from God. Maybe I needed a reminder of God's faithful presence in that hectic day... I hadn't thought of that myself...

Do you see the little hearts that our Sunday school kids created for us to use in worship? Do you see the biggest one with **"Jesus"** printed in the middle of the heart? I think that our kids know. The Spirit of God, Jesus enters into our hearts when we are baptized. God promises to be present to give us life, hope and joy the rest of our days. God is in our hearts, but where can we see God out in our everyday lives?

John the Baptist had likely been looking for Jesus, God's beloved Son, for most of his days. John had literally been born to bear witness to God's promised Messiah, Savior of the people. John first had the chance to baptize Jesus. Then in our Gospel text for today, John gets the chance to fulfill his mission of pointing Jesus out to the people. **"Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world... I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God."** The next day, John, standing

with two of his own disciples, gets the chance to point Jesus out to them, **“Look, here is the Lamb of God!”**

The two disciples of John had apparently been looking for God in their own lives as well, so they headed over to check Jesus out. Jesus saw them following him and asked, **“What are you looking for?”** They responded, **“Rabbi/Teacher, where are you staying?”** Jesus answered them, **“Come and see.”** Then the two spent the day with Jesus. At days end, one of them, **Andrew**, went and found his brother **Simon** and said, **“We have found the Messiah.”** Then Andrew brought Simon to meet Jesus and Jesus said to Simon, **“You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas” (which is translated Peter).** Oh, we recognize that name. Peter was the disciple that Jesus used to lead the early Christian church after Jesus was resurrected from the dead and ascended to heaven.

Do you see it? **John** is looking for Jesus and there he is. **Andrew** is looking for God and John points out Jesus, there he is. **Peter** isn't looking for anyone, but Andrew says, **“We found God”** and here Jesus is! And Andrew and Peter and a handful of others ended up starting the Christian church that we are a part of now 2,000 years later. Even Jesus said to those who were looking for God, **“Come and see.”**

Have you come here today expecting to see Jesus? When you are going about your everyday life out there, do you sometimes get a glimpse of God at work? In my previous parish, working with **Pastor Jennifer Wilson** and with **Pastor Erika Nilsen** (former pastor at First in Aitkin), one or the other of us, or maybe all three, would witness some truly amazing event in people's lives, and we would say, almost simultaneously, **“Holy Spirit”** or **“That was a God thing.”** We weren't throwing this out all the time. Some people see God in an empty parking spot or in not getting a speeding ticket when they deserved one. I am talking about times when it seemed that only God's love and grace could have pulled off such a good or beautiful thing contrary to what might have been expected to happen.

I asked our freshmen on Wednesday night if they come to church expecting to be bored or if they come looking for Jesus to somehow show up and speak to them? Our church council discussed whether or not people here at First Lutheran come to worship planning to experience the presence of God. Do you experience the presence of God when you come for worship?

Are you listening for God right now? How did you get here? What person or persons introduced you to God, pointed you to Jesus?

Remember in our Gospel text how Andrew and Peter came into Jesus' life? Or maybe better, remember how Jesus came into their lives? And do you also remember how Jesus used that first handful of followers to go out into the everyday world and introduce people to Jesus? That is still happening.

Have you ever introduced anyone to the Jesus that lives in your heart? I'm not thinking about preaching on some street corner or airport. I'm thinking about you sharing an important, life-giving Word with someone who is actually close to you...

Pastor Albert Schmidt tells of an experience he had following the funeral of a five year old boy. The seven year old brother, George, had tried to jump into the grave when his brother's casket was being lowered. Back at the house afterwards, family and friends gathered and the pastor stopped to visit. George, his mother said, was in his room and wouldn't come out.

Pastor Schmidt writes,

As I entered his room I could see neither hide nor hair of George. I called his name. From underneath the bunk bed came his answer: **"I'm here and I'm never coming out."**

I talked to him until I was blue in the face. I told him about heaven and about how happy his brother must be. I tried every argument and bribe, even resorting to telling him how his brother wouldn't like what he was doing. Nothing worked.

Finally, the Lord caught my attention with his two-by-four and gave me what must have been "**his idea**." I crawled under the bed with (George), not instantly because the space allotted under the bed was not as large as the space of my body. The bed frames were pushing hard into my chest and the floor seemed to penetrate my back. But I just lay next to him and said, "**Well, if you're going to stay here for the rest of your life, then I'm going to stay here with you.**"

After 15 minutes of eternity, George decided we could crawl out and join the rest of the folks. His mom gave us cookies and milk. It felt like a sacramental meal to me.

I didn't lay there in pain for six hours as our Lord did upon the cross. I did precious little vicarious suffering. Nor did I change forms to become what George was. Yet I must confess, I felt Christmas and the incarnation under that bed as I never felt it before. How grateful I am that the Lord always crawls under my bed when I need it."
 (Under the Double-Decker Bed, Albert R. Schmidt, from Tapestry, Augsburg Publishing House, Minneapolis, 1985.)

We live in a world where people often find themselves facing trouble or loss. Sometimes it is us suffering. Sometimes it is others who suffer. Jesus touched the lives of John, Andrew and Peter in such a way that they committed their lives to following him. They committed their lives to sharing the Good News of a God who comes under our bed, into our closet, to our workplace, to our garage or wherever else it is that we go to lick our wounds and decide what to do next. And once God has helped us to get up and going again, God invites us to be there for others.

Dr. David Lose writes, "**At its heart, evangelism is noticing what God is doing in our lives, sharing that with others, and inviting them to come and see for themselves.**" Like Pastor Schmidt climbed under the little boy's bunk bed to be with him, so also God uses you and me to enter into difficult spots with those around us. Sometimes all we can do is to wait with them – no magical answers, no wonderful solutions, just loving presence.

Can you think of someone who has been lovingly present for you in a tough time? Was that Jesus in them? Have you ever been lovingly present for someone else going through a tough time? Was that Jesus in you? Have you ever had the courage to tell a family member or friend in a tough spot, "**I am praying for you?**" Have you ever dared to say, "**God has helped me when I have been in trouble?**" How about, "**Can I give you a ride to church?**"

Today's Gospel text recounts **John** telling **Andrew** who tells **Peter** who together find Jesus in their everyday lives. Dr. David Lose writes, "**A very small start is made in this little glimpse from John's gospel, one person sharing with another, but look at the huge and amazing results that followed. Our own very small efforts may seem like nothing, hardly worth the bother, but for God who brought light out of**

darkness and who raises the dead to new life(, God) wants to – and will! – do marvelous things through them.”

This week I saw a little rectangle of light with the shadow of a cross reflected on this sanctuary wall. Was God there somehow? I need to be reminded of God's life-giving presence again and again. Have you seen God there somehow in your life? Is there someone you know who may need to see God somehow present in their life? Can God use you to show them? Will God use you to show them?

Have you seen God at work someplace lately? How about writing your story down and putting it in the offering plate today? Then maybe some other day, you can personally tell someone who needs to hear it. One day at a time. Jesus will be there under the bed with you when you need him. He's under your friend's bed too. Thanks be to God. Amen.