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Immanuel Lutheran Church, New York, NY  
1/19/2014, The Second Sunday after Epiphany  
Brothers, Brothers

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

<sup>41</sup>[Andrew] first found his brother Simon, and said to him,  
“We have found the Messiah” (which means Christ). <sup>42</sup>He  
brought him to Jesus. (John 1:41-42, RSV)

My wife, Carol, and I love the movie *White Christmas* with Bing Crosby and Danny Kaye. As soon as Thanksgiving comes, Carol begins thinking about playing the movie again. It’s a tradition in our home.

Carol especially loves the duet “Sisters, Sisters,” sung by Rosemary Cluny and Vera Ellen:

Sisters, sisters  
There were never such devoted sisters...

Carol loves that song for the simple reason that she loves her sisters, Sara and Ingrid.

And that’s pretty much how it is in this morning’s Gospel Lesson, except that we could call the song, “Brothers, Brothers.” And so it is that Andrew immediately fetches his brother Simon and brings him to Jesus. When Andrew is excited about something, he does not keep it to himself, but turns to someone who seems always close to his heart: Simon Peter, his brother.

## **THE MISSION IN MINIATURE**

What we have in this simple family story is the ancient mission of Israel played out in miniature. Israel is the Chosen People, especially beloved to our God. But Israel’s *mission* is to bring people to the LORD. Furthermore, in this morning’s reading from Isaiah 49, we see that Israel’s mission is not simply to bring Jews to the LORD, but to bring all the world to him. And so we read this great conversation between the LORD and his Servant:

<sup>6</sup>[The LORD] says: “It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved of Israel; I will give you as a light *to the nations*, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”

This is why the coastlands and the people afar off can have some hope in this world. Salvation is meant for everyone, not just for the Jews. And yet, even if salvation is meant for everyone, it often begins in miniature, when one brother turns to another, or one sister to turns to another, and says “Come with me to Jesus.”

As with many good things, you have to start somewhere. The salvation of the world begins with you and me turning to those who are near to us and inviting them to Jesus.

## THE SUBLIME PREACHING OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

It was the sublime preaching John the Baptist that started this thing. John is a preacher — an eloquent, forceful preacher. When he praises Jesus, he does so with every title and form of praise available to him.<sup>1</sup> In our short passage, he piles up the praise, he multiplies the adoration describing Jesus:

✠ “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! (John 1:29, RSV)

Here John applies one of Israel’s most cherished images: the Paschal Lamb, who saves the people. To say of Jesus that he is the Lamb of God “who takes away the sins of *the world*” is to say an immense thing about Jesus. It speaks of a world of hope for humanity, but also of a world of suffering for Jesus, who is to be a “lamb to the slaughter.”

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. (Isaiah 53:7, KJV)

✠ <sup>30</sup>This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks before me, for he *was before me*.’ (John 1:30, RSV)

Here John the Baptist testifies to a great theme from the opening words of the Gospel: that Jesus was “in the beginning” — indeed, that Jesus is God:

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<sup>1</sup> This section on John’s preaching about Jesus and the next section on the comparative simplicity of the two disciple’s words to Jesus comes from the brilliant little commentary of Charles L. Campbell in *The Lectionary Commentary: The Gospels* on John 1:29-42.

<sup>1</sup>In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup>The same was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup>All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. (John 1:1-3, KJV)

✠ <sup>32</sup>And John bore witness, “I saw the Spirit descend as a dove from heaven, and it remained on him.”

Here the Baptist speaks of the continual blessing of the Spirit on Jesus. The Spirit who had inspired the prophets, the Spirit who had inspired the shepherd boy David to fight Goliath and to compose Psalms: this Spirit descended on Jesus and “remained on him.” It did not remain on David, who fell into grievous sin, but it did remain on Jesus — a wonderful thing to be able to report about someone.

And then we come to the capstone of John’s testimony:

✠ <sup>34</sup>And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.” (John 1:34, RSV)

John did not remain silent about Jesus. Perhaps another man would have. Perhaps the fame that John himself received would have tempted him to remain silent about someone greater than himself. Perhaps John’s ego could have gotten in the way. But no! John bears witness to Jesus. And what a witness it is: “this is the Son of God”!

## COME AND SEE

Compared to the sublime preaching of John the Baptist, the follow-up words of John’s disciples are pretty plain and humble. Two of those disciples of John do the plausible thing: John has pointed to Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, so these two disciples up and follow Jesus. Jesus notices them and speaks to them, with his first words in John’s Gospel. He asks the trailing disciples a soul-searching question:

<sup>38</sup>Jesus turned, and saw them following, and said to them, “What do you seek?” (John 1:38, RSV)

One commentator points out that this is their chance to ask some profound question — some question in keeping with the majestic things they have heard about Jesus from their master John the Baptist:

One might have expected a more profound response: “I’m seeking the meaning of life” or “Why is there so much suffering in the world?” Instead, the “seekers” simply reply, “Where are you staying?”<sup>2</sup>

They ask for Jesus’s address. To this question, Jesus answers simply “Come, and see.”

Interestingly, this little exchange goes to the heart of John’s Gospel. In John’s Gospel, Jesus is not after mystics or geniuses or intellectuals or people who know abstract matters about the meaning of life and so on. Jesus is simply after people who will stick close to him. “Come, and see.” Note the order of the verbs. He does not say, “See all the great truth about me. Then you will want to follow me.” No, it goes the other way round: “Come, walk with me, and in the walking you will begin to see things differently. You will begin to see things better.”

St. John’s Gospel has rightly been called the most abstract, the most elevated, and the most far-seeing of the four gospels. That’s why our St. John the Evangelist statue here has the eagle at John’s feet. That high-flying bird is John’s symbol. And yet there is a sense in which St. John’s Gospel is the most intimate and humble of the Gospels. What matters to Jesus in John’s Gospel is that we should love him and abide with him. That was the threefold question for St. Peter at the end of the Gospel:

Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? (John 21:16, KJV)

Along with the other Gospels, St. John wants Christians to obey God’s commandments. But John does not urge obedience to the commandments because the commandments are splendid or because they are good for us, but simply because that is how we go about loving Jesus:

If you *love* me, you will keep my commandments. (John 14:15, RSV)

In John’s Gospel, Jesus does not seek theology degrees or even people who can write or follow or remember sermons, but simply people who will stick close to him:

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid, page 484.

Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. (John 15:4, RSV)

Be pleased to think about this. Whether we are high or low, bright or dim, well-educated or not, we can all do this: We can follow Jesus *as best we understand him*. And we can seek to understand and to love him even more.

## **EVANGELISM**

This little scene in today's Gospel, this miniature picture of one brother bringing another brother to Jesus, is an illustration of the kind of longing for souls that the Bible has. Israel was never meant to flourish for her own sake, but also for the sake of the nations. And the Church was never meant to flourish for her own sake, but for the sake of winning others to Christ. If Andrew had not brought his brother Simon Peter to Jesus, I think Andrew would have grieved over that and would have felt that he had let both his brother and himself down. Let it always be so with the Church, including our little congregation, Immanuel Lutheran Church, that we will suffer a kind of holy grief for a world that does not yet know Jesus, and that therefore we will do what we can to say to others, "Come, and see. Come and see my Saviour Jesus," to whom belongs the glory, with the Father and the Holy Spirit now and forever. Amen.