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Immanuel Lutheran Church, New York, NY  
1/15/2017, The Second Sunday after the Epiphany  
Isaiah 49:1-7, John 1:29-42

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

In this sermon, I desire that we should linger with the call of our Lord's first two disciples. We know the name of one of them: it was Andrew. We do not know the name of the other. As the story goes along, we will find that Andrew soon collects his brother, Peter. After all, how can Andrew leave his brother out in the cold? Andrew is persuaded that he has found the Messiah. This is news worth sharing with his brother. So he hastens off to his brother to bring him to Jesus. It is a good pattern for us. If we have found Jesus and he means much to us, let us hasten off to others to bring them to Jesus too. I mean to return to this point later. For now, I want to begin with the opening conversation between Jesus and the two disciples. John the Baptist points the two disciples toward Jesus. The scene goes this way:

...John was standing with two of his disciples; <sup>36</sup>and he looked at Jesus as he walked, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" <sup>37</sup>The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. <sup>38</sup>Jesus turned, and saw them following, and said to them, "What do you seek?" And they said to him, "Rabbi" (which means Teacher), "where are you staying?" <sup>39</sup>He said to them, "Come and see." (John 1:36-39, RSV)

Few of us can give a better answer to a searcher than the answer Jesus here gives to the two disciples: "Come and see." Let's file this divine answer away in our memories in case of need: "Come and see."

Earlier this week, Carol and I received a fun Christmas card from our former Music Director Charles Schramm. Charles has been retired from Immanuel for a good long time now, though we still feel his good presence because Gwen often uses his Psalm tones in our Sunday liturgy. Charles lives in Maine. So, he is pretty far away. Still, he enjoys following our congregation by way of our newsletters. His recent Christmas card reveals that Charles still knows what is going on here at Immanuel. So, in his distinctive, beautiful lettering, he wrote this greeting to me: "Merry Christmas and Happy New Year, Gregory van Pelt."

That greeting, "Gregory van Pelt," refers to my Pastor's Booth on Tuesday mornings. Briefly, my Pastor's Booth is a take-off on one of the Peanut's

cartoon characters: Lucy van Pelt. Lucy, a self-confident child, has her “Psychiatric Help” booth. She charges five cents. The Peanuts characters pay their nickel, sit on her stool, and receive her interesting advice.

So, I do a similar thing on Tuesday mornings. I have my sign: “Spiritual Help, 5¢” “The Pastor Is In.” And people sit down on my stool. Sometimes, they sit on my stool and begin to cry. It happens so often, I have learned to have tissues ready for them. Humanity, you know, has its hopes and dreams and fears, sorrows and setbacks. I try to be available to the people of the city. I do what clergy all across the city and all across the land do: I try to listen carefully and to answer back in an encouraging way by speaking of Jesus.

I have seekers, then, who sit at my booth. They are seeking strength and grace for the day, they are seeking comfort because they are lonely or they grieve for loved ones, they are seeking prayer for the concerns of their hearts. In one fashion or another, they all seem to be seeking something. If I could, like a child, I would take each of them by the hand and lead them to Jesus. That’s what John the Baptist did. He took those two disciples and pointed them to Jesus: “Behold, the Lamb of God who taketh away the sins of the world.” Those two disciples took John at his word, followed Jesus, never came back to John, and I bet they never regretted a thing.

When the two disciples in our Gospel story begin to trail on behind Jesus, he turns to them and asks them a most soul-searching question:

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

It gave them a chance to speak of the things on their hearts. What do they seek? Sometimes, when people stop by my booth, they seek things that are easy enough to understand: “I think I am getting a cold. Could you pray for me?” Sometimes, the person seeks something that would nearly break anyone’s heart: “I seek my son. He is homeless. I do not know where he is. Could you pray for him?” That question, “What do you seek?” seems to apply to each of us. We each seek something. Maybe if we thought about it, we could come up with a good, long list of things we seek: we seek health, friendship, money to keep us afloat, peace in our hearts, peace in our land, world peace. If we really thought about it, we could probably come up with a noble list of things we seek.

But these two disciples answer with perhaps the wisest answer. They simply seek where Jesus lives. They bypass all the noble answers and needs of life and instead ask their practical question:

<sup>38</sup>Jesus turned, and saw them following, and said to them,  
“What do you seek?” And they said to him, “Rabbi” (which

means Teacher), “where are you staying?” (John 1:38, RSV)

At first glance it might seem that they have fumbled away their chance for philosophy and noble discourse. But God bless those two disciples. They have chosen well. They seek not so much answers to particular questions, but rather they seek the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world. They seek Someone worth following. And in Jesus, they find him!

The answer of Jesus, then, accords perfectly with the spirit of their question. “Where are you staying?” Answer: “Come and see” (John 1:39). Notice the sequence of the verbs. We modern people would probably be more comfortable reversing the order. We would like to first “see” and then “come.” We would, for example, be glad to know all of Christian theology, if a good teacher could teach it to us. Let us know it all in advance and then we can make up our mind whether to be Christians. But in the Bible’s stories of Jesus calling his disciples, our Lord always seems to reverse the sequence we favor. He says “Come and see.”

Zacchaeus was a wee little man,  
and a wee little man was he.  
He climbed up in a sycamore tree  
For the Lord he wanted to see.

And when the Savior passed that way  
He looked up in the tree.  
And said, ‘Zacchaeus, you come down!  
For I’m going to your house today!  
For I’m going to your house today!’ (Rf. Luke 19)

Jesus does not debate philosophy with the man. Come down, Zacchaeus. Come down. We have life to begin anew!

Jesus sees fishermen casting their nets, and he simply says, “Follow me.” He does not enter into discussions of “Why is their evil in the world?” It is an important question. Certainly it is. But Jesus does not pause to discuss the matter with the fishermen. He simply calls them to follow him. And in following him, there is some less evil in the world. For in following him, the fishers of fish become fishers of humanity, fishermen becomes apostles, and sinners become saints.

As I sit at my Pastor’s booth, I often grieve that I do not have eloquence enough, I do not have wit enough, to answer in a convincing way all the questions that a weary and frightened world can ask. So sometime I wish I could simply be a child and take people by the hand and lead them to Someone I love, Someone I trust could help them.

To be a human being is to seek God, lest we end up in the madhouse or in despair. We simply are not made for meaninglessness! In the end, the only interesting question is whether our God is the true one. Do we worship the *real* God, or we have been casting in our lot with some god who will let us down in the long run. Again, we human beings are built for faith, lest we go mad. The great question in life is “In What do you place your faith? In Whom do you place your faith?” I am counting on Jesus. And out of love for humanity I want others to count on Jesus too. I want to bring people to Jesus, nail people to Jesus.

So John the Baptist does not begrudge the loss of his two disciples. John is a great man. Multitudes follow him, cherish his words, and are glad to be baptized by him. Such acclaim could tempt one toward vainglory and egoism. But John’s heart is big enough that he wants the best he can give for his disciples. So, he points them, not to himself, but to Jesus:

“Behold, the Lamb of God!” (John 1:36, RSV)

Those two disciples follow Jesus, never return to John, and, again, I bet they do not regret a thing. So it goes for many people who have followed Jesus. They might live to white hair, but they do not regret a thing.

In our First Lesson, the Lord says something grand thing to Israel. He says that Israel is destined to not only be blest, but to be a blessing for the whole world:

<sup>6</sup>he 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.”  
(Isaiah 49:6, RSV)

It is in full accord with this universal longing of God for everyone – that “my salvation may reach to the end of the earth,” that Andrew fetches his brother, Peter. Having found Jesus, Andrew understands that he must try to help his brother find Jesus too. It is no cold duty Andrew feels: rather it is joy and excitement he cannot keep to himself, he dare not keep to himself. And so we have the lovely ending to our Gospel story:

<sup>41</sup>He [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 brothers and sisters in Christ, whenever you feel the impulse to bring someone to Jesus, cherish it and try to act upon it. Whenever your heart is yearning to introduce someone to Jesus, try to recognize that impulse for what it is: it is the cry of love at work in you. Jesus will not let Andrew down. Nor will he let Peter down. So let Andrew bring Peter to our Lord. Jesus will not let you down, and he will not let your brother or sister down, so let us try to bring our brother and sister, parent and neighbor, even strangers and enemies to Jesus, to whom belongs the glory, with the Father and the Holy Spirit now and forever. Amen.