

Preached by Dr. Carl Rush  
Bush Hill Presbyterian Church  
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John 1:29-42  
Isaiah 49:1-7

## “COME AND LOOK” FAITH

Do you remember the first time you heard or said, “Come and look, Mom, Dad; somebody, come and look what I’ve done!” Maybe it was a drawing or a coloring book, maybe a Lego house, or a sand castle. “Come and look how the waves come into the moat and surround my sand castle. Come, look what I’ve done.” Whether you were coloring outside of the lines or practicing the perfect dive, they came and you were glad. You have that image in your mind—that image of witnessing the reality of a person being formed.

The Gospel of John loves to create word images, not just of ideas, but word images about people. These images, possibly in John more so than in any other Gospel, point us toward the profound truth that the Gospel is indeed our story of coming to faith. Listen to the way John the Baptizer is quoted in verse 29 announcing Jesus as the Lamb of God. We’ve become very comfortable with that language, Lamb of God, we’ve used it all during Christmas; we will be indebted to John when our Lenten season begins. The Lamb of God, for 20 centuries, has become quite a familiar term; but the truth is, the Lamb of God is a new term for scripture.

In the Old Testament, the lamb may have been used for daily sacrifice ceremonies, or after the exodus from Egypt, it may have been that special spotless lamb chosen for the Passover sacrifice. But, the truth is lambs weren’t used for taking away sins. There was only one sacrifice once a year that was a sin sacrifice, and it took place with a goat, not a lamb. A goat would be led to the edge of the city and all the sins of the community would be ceremonially placed on the goat, and then it would be driven out into the wilderness as a symbol of God taking our sin away. So where is John going with this new word image, the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world?

I wonder if we can catch, almost throughout the way John writes, that there’s just a little bit of teasing or deceit going on because of the ambiguous way in which he writes. There’s all sort of little word plays going on here. He sees Peter, *cehps*, which sounds a lot like the word for rock with the same letters in the middle (*petrus*). If we had been listening then, it would be like hearing Carl and Carol, the same thing. John is talking to us in a way that is meant to capture our imagination because we would not believe what God is really doing in Christ.

Do you remember, when the Berlin Wall came down, the television images that you watched? The story goes that in Prague, Czechoslovakia, in a small parish, a church created an even smaller sign and put it in the grass in front of the church. The sign said, “The lamb wins.” Not the bear, not the lion ... the lamb.

The Lamb of God is John’s way of saying God knows that we are looking for something we can find nowhere else, so Jesus turns in John to the two disciples and says, “What

are you looking for?" They are nervous, but we would be too. How many of you, when asked, "When you go to Bush Hill every Sunday or whenever you go to church anywhere, what are you looking for? What's that about?" Would your answer instinctively be that you're looking to find the purpose of Jesus' life in your life? I don't think your answer would instinctively be the right words or even the right image. They might be descriptive like John the Gospel writer, but none of us would automatically come up with "I'm looking for something other than my understanding of life. I'm looking for Christ's glory and a way to live that out."

Isaiah said my cause is with the Lord and my reward with God. Following Jesus usually ends up being about our agendas—our purpose—no matter how hard we try to make it otherwise. That's why there's always that time of preparation to hear the Word by saying to God, "I am not perfect, I have sinned, I have fallen short." But when faith becomes a "come and look" experience—come and look what's in our midst—we know we can't do that on our own.

There was an ecumenical council back in the 60s that said without the Holy Spirit, God is far from the church, Christ is just something that happened in the past, and the Gospel is dead. The church, without the Holy Spirit, essentially becomes nothing more than an organization, an authority that becomes dominion. Mission becomes nothing more than propaganda. Liturgy, worship, is less about proclaiming and more about just evoking some mysterious spirit. Christian living is reduced to slave morality.

But with the Holy Spirit, the whole cosmos is resurrected. How many of us would respond to the question, "What's that going to church every week about?" with, "It's about the resurrection of the entire universe. It's about the risen Christ literally being present with my fellow worshippers. It's about authority that liberates me for service and mission; it's like a mini Pentecost, Acts II all over again, an eruption of energy and power."

Did you catch the connection in the assurance of pardon? When we've been forgiven, we've been empowered. Liturgy can be about remembering about reverence, but it can also be about anticipation. On this weekend of all weekends, can we remember that the civil rights movement, and worship at that time, was about anticipation of a day when things would be different. It was, in fact, despite all of the problems with the personalities involved—it was human action becoming God's justice in our midst.

Come and look. That's the image I have of Andrew in this story. Andrew goes to get his brother to say, "You're not going to believe; you've got to come and see this." Come and look for Jesus. This will mean less about what we would envision and more about investing in what can be worthy of praise, that which brings God glory. It is impossible for you to have a conversation with Ophelia Johnson about Todee Mission without hearing her say that this is to bring God glory, first and foremost. That's what Jesus is saying to those who were going to follow him that day—this is about you becoming part of the glory of God, come with me and see.

I love this congregation because I've noticed a few things. On Sunday mornings, you save the back pews for visitors, and that's really cool. At 8:30, I mentioned that I had

read something from a Methodist hymnal, but I couldn't find the hymnal. Somebody went home and brought me the hymnal. This is the kind of place we are; you're so responsive. It's from a quote by John Wesley in a 1761 hymnal that was re-printed in one of the editions of the Methodist hymnal. You're not going to hear me quoting the Methodists often, so this is good.

Here are Wesley's directions for singing: "Learn these tunes before you learn any others. Sing them exactly as they are printed here without altering or mending them at all. If you learn to sing them otherwise, unlearn it as soon as you can. See that you join with the congregation as frequently as you can. Beware of singing as if you are half-dead or half-asleep. Lift up your voice with strength so you are not to brawl so as to be heard or distinct from the rest of the congregation that you might destroy harmony. Strive to unite your voices together so as to make one clear, melodious sound. Sing in time, just as quick as we did at first. And above all, sing spiritually. Have an eye to God in every word you sing. Aim at pleasing God more than yourself or any other creature. See that your heart is not carried away with the sound, but rather offer to God so that your singing may be such that the Lord will approve and reward you when He comes in the clouds of heaven."

Our practice of faith could take a lesson from Wesley's words about singing. Come and see faith, living alive, visible in God's purposes in our midst. God's purposes controlling our practices. Archbishop Ramsey lived a long time before he penned these words. If you can take nothing else away from today (although Wesley was just wonderful today), take his words. He says in God there is no un-Christ-likeness at all. It really is just that simple. You see, in the end, the lamb wins.

Thanks be to God.