

January 15, 2023
1 Corinthians 1:1-9
John 1:29-43

Not Us, But Jesus

“Look, here is the Lamb of God.” Hey over here, this one, this guy I baptized. It’s him, the Messiah, the one you’ve been waiting for.” That’s John’s message today. It’s his job. It’s his whole reason to exist, to point to Jesus and help others see him. And if you think about it, it’s our job too as the church. Our reason to exist is that we point to Jesus. We help others see him. “Look, here is the one who saves us, the one who heals us. Here is the one who takes away the sin of the whole world.”

Like John the Baptist, we point to Jesus. That’s what we do. We do not point to ourselves, and our greatness. We point to God’s greatness. Like John, we know that it’s not really about us. It’s not ultimately about our building or our worship or our mission. It’s not about trying to make our church bigger and better and more famous. It’s about Jesus. It’s about the one who baptizes not just with water but with fire and the Spirit. It’s about the one whose sandals we are not worthy to untie. It’s about the one who is greater than us, who will save us and transform us and bring us from death into new life.

The church points to something beyond itself. And we tell others about this thing beyond us. This bigger someone who is not us, who connects us to God. Who gives us hope and courage to believe that all is not lost. That even when there is no way, God will make a way. We have faith that his love and mercy will save us. Not violence and war. Not greed or selfishness. Not cruel kings or demagogues. They can't take away the sins of the world. Only love is the way. Only surrender, and suffering, and sacrifice. Into your hands, O Lord, I commit my spirit. For the sake of love. That's what will heal us. That's what will heal the world.

Love. Mercy and forgiveness. Grace and compassion. That's what we as the church point to. We point to Jesus who shows us the heart of God.

Like a highway sign, like a compass needle, we point beyond ourselves to something else. Beyond our Presbyterian denomination. Beyond our Book of Order. Beyond the surprisingly vicious world of 'Christian' politics and Bible verses turned into weapons. We look to Jesus who is what God looks like to us. He has given us his Spirit. And we rely on his Spirit to show us the way, to keep revealing the kingdom of God. Look.

There. Do you see it? Do you see the Spirit of Jesus? Do you see him

healing the sick, feeding the 5000, embracing the outcast, welcoming the child? Look the Lamb of God.

We point to something bigger than ourselves here. That's why we must go beyond ourselves so often. It is such a beautiful thing that we can share Sunday school with the Methodist church. And do Vacation Bible school with the Christian Church and the Baptist church. And celebrate Pentecost with the AME church. This is our family, formed by Jesus.

Visible wherever there is humility and service and love. Wherever there is welcome, and we lay down our lives for each other. Look, the Lamb of God. God's heart on display. For all of us, black, brown, white, old, young, left, right, up, down, wise and foolish. God is for us. Not against us.

God is there. And God is here. We look and see God in each of us, you and me. Jesus' spirit is in our midst. This year, I'd like to turn and return to that. To lean into it. To focus on the Spirit of Christ and how we point to it. How can we be like John the Baptist, directing ourselves always to the Lamb of God? In worship and mission and fellowship. Every time we gather, consciously, intentionally, remembering why we are here.

Remembering to point to the mercy and forgiveness and hope of Jesus.

Turning away from the stress and anger and franticness of the world, to look at him. To seek him. And follow him. And abide with him.

Look, says John. There he is. And others go and follow him. In our gospel lesson, Andrew goes. And the next day, he brings his brother Peter along. He has found something. He has discovered something real, something he was searching for. Come and see, says Andrew. Come and see, says Jesus. That's the invitation we give as the church. Come and see. Jesus is here. Not off in a faraway heaven. Or in a future time. He is here wherever two or three are gathered in his name. At the baptismal font with squirmy babies. At this table where we eat and drink and remember. In our own lives. Showing us a life bigger than our own. Bigger than our problems at school. Bigger than our frustrations at work. Bigger than our aging. Bigger than a frightening illness. Bigger than our past or any mistakes we've made. Bigger than the opinions or judgments of those around us. God's love has already saved us. It has qualified us. And brought us together; all of us who have been cast out, left out, or shut out. All who have never been God's kind of people before. Listen to

this. You are God's kind of people. The kind God cares about. The kind that belongs in the family of Jesus.

We point to Jesus and to his kingdom which is so much bigger than any we can create. It's bigger than Midway. Bigger than Kentucky. Bigger than the United States of America. It's bigger than our race or our gender or our orientation or our family name. It's bigger than any big piles of money. Or a million likes on social media. God is bigger than all of that. And life in Jesus is so much more. That's what we point to. We point to the peace we long for. The love we need. The connection we're hungry for. The life breathed into us at the beginning. The homecoming. The abiding. We find it in Jesus. We find it working in the Garden. In Bible study and prayer for one another. In leading VBS. In snack time after church with lemonade and pretzels. We connect with each other and the Spirit of Jesus. Look and see. Come and find where Jesus abides. Where do you find the heart of Jesus? When does your spirit dwell with the Spirit of Christ?

Like John the Baptist, we point beyond ourselves to Jesus. We point the way with grace and gentleness. With faith seeking understanding. With

compassion instead of criticism. Because you can't point to love if you do not love. You cannot point to amazing grace if we do not have amazing grace. To point the way, we have to get it. We have to know ourselves and understand what it means: Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world and gives his life so that others may have life. Look, I see the Spirit of Jesus. We don't have to save the world. We must only point to the one who does. We don't need to be big or mighty. We have everything we need to be the church. All we need are hearts and minds and hands. And time and attention. That is enough. It is more than enough. So how might you dedicate yourself to that this year? How could you remember every day to direct your gaze to Jesus? To remember what you put your hope in. To remember what you value and what you love. Look and see. Give your attention to Jesus. Behold, the reflection of God, the heart of God. The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.