

SERMON- EPIPHANY 2

A WORD FROM THE WORD

The following day John was again standing with two of his disciples. As Jesus walked by, John looked at him and declared, "Look! There is the Lamb of God!" When John's two disciples heard this, they followed Jesus.

Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of these men who heard what John said and then followed Jesus. Andrew went to find his brother, Simon, and told him, "We have found the Messiah" (which means "Christ").

Billy Graham Crusade

In 1947 Billy Graham began an evangelism crusade at Maddison Square Gardens in New York. It lasted for 12 weeks. A significant aspect of that crusade was an altar call, accompanied by the singing of **Just as I am**.

It was the first of over four hundred Billy Graham crusades, held in most countries in the world. Billy Graham crusaded for over 58 years. In 1984, 1.1 million people attended the crusade in Seoul. That was the biggest. There was even a Billy Graham Crusade in Beijing in 1988. He crusaded in Australia four times, 1959, 1968, 1969 and 1979.

In 1968, Billy Graham held crusades in Brisbane and Sydney. With great anticipation, my father took me to the Brisbane Exhibition Ground where there were probably about 20,000 people. I can't remember much, except that there were a lot of people, and the stage was too far away to see what was going on.

In 2019, while I was in Darwin, I joined a team of Christian leaders who provided prayer and counselling support for his son, Franklin Graham. There were a number of training sessions and we waited in great anticipation. It was a fascinating experience, even if Franklin didn't seem to be half the preacher that his father was.

When it was all over, I remember reflecting on this event. What were we looking for? What did we go out to see? What did we find? Did people come simply because Franklin was Billy Graham's son?

They are exactly the same questions that Jesus asked of those who travelled to Bethany, across the Jordan, to listen to the renowned preacher called John the Baptist. John came from a family of priests and lived a very disciplined spiritual life in a religious community just north of the Dead Sea.

Later, Jesus asked these questions: **"Who is this man in the wilderness that you went out to see? Did you find him weak as a reed, moved by every breath of wind? Or were you expecting to see a man dressed in expensive clothes? Those who dress like that live in palaces, not out in the wilderness. Were you looking for a prophet? Yes, and he is more than a prophet."**

John the Baptist Crusade

I want you to take a journey with some of those who travelled to Bethany across the Jordan. Among them were a few men who had travelled from Galilee in the north, a couple of fishermen Simon and Andrew, and their friends, Philip and Nathanael. It sounds like they were already deeply committed followers of John. John's sole purpose was to prepare for the Messiah. His message involved an altar call. "Repent and be baptised." And he instructed people on God's righteousness. "Don't abuse your authority and be satisfied with what God has given you."

What were the crowds of people looking for? We know that some were simply onlookers and others were doing intelligence research. Why did people travel from Jerusalem to the small religious community living on the edge of the wilderness? What attracted them?

Was it how John dressed? (Camel's Hair was seen as a sign of his austerity. It was considered proof of his radical and extreme personality.) Was it his Fire and Brimstone preaching style? (His passion hinted at evidence of madness, according to his critics.) Was it his integrity? (Herod Antipas was irritated by John's criticisms of his immoral life)

John the Baptist led a community committed to his preaching and life. It is possible that he had already been a part of their community and rose from among them. But as attractive as John the Baptist had become to the people of Jerusalem who travelled out to his revival crusades, John made it clear, right from the very beginning, that he was not the main event.

Are you the Messiah? NO! Are you Elijah? NO! Then, are you a prophet? NO! Who are you? "I am a voice shouting in the wilderness."

Pointing to Jesus: The Lamb of God

To his own community John gave a bold directive: Look! There he is, The Lamb of God! But not all of his community changed their commitment from John to Jesus. The community of John remained intact for many years, even after John was imprisoned for his bold preaching. Nevertheless, the connections between Jesus and John remained strong, very strong.

At that time some disciples of John came to question Jesus, and after a discussion about the validity of Jesus' work as the Messiah, Jesus emphasized the significance of John as a Prophet, as The Voice in the Wilderness, and as a spiritual leader.

"I assure you, of all who have ever lived, none is greater than John the Baptist. Yet even the most insignificant person in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than he is!"

After those words, Jesus went on to draw a line, a clear line between John's connection to the Old Covenant and its emphasis on a commitment to the Law, and Jesus' overflowing grace.

In spite of that separation, between the Law and Grace, John's influence as a preacher and spiritual leader was so significant that years later his followers were found in Corinth and Ephesus. So what had those men been searching for? What did they see in John the Baptist? Eventually, the Holy Spirit turned them to Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah.

Far more importantly for us is that we direct our questions to the enthusiastic comments of Andrew to his older brother Simon:

Andrew went to find his brother, Simon, and told him, "We have found the Messiah".

The Lamb of God! The Messiah! These are words that the people of Jerusalem, the people of Israel, understood clearly. They pointed to the hope that those people had for the sovereign power of Yahweh over their lives.

What are **we** looking for in Jesus? How do we direct others to Jesus? Before we can begin to point to Jesus we need to know what Jesus means for us. How would you describe Jesus? How does Jesus meet your deepest needs? Would you point to Jesus as the Messiah, the Christ, as God's Passover Lamb? What words would you use to describe how Jesus brings life into your life.

In him we find grace and forgiveness!

So the Word became human and lived here on earth among us. He was full of grace and truth, unfailing love and faithfulness.