

January 19, 2020 – John 1:29-42a & 1 Corinthians 1:1-9

You may not realize it, but our Gospel lesson this week is a little... peculiar. There's nothing particularly odd about the message. What's interesting, however, is how it is presented to us.

If you remember, last week we celebrated the Baptism of our Lord. And we heard from Matthew's Gospel what happened at Jesus' baptism. How he came to John the Baptist. Went into the Jordan River. Insisted that he must be baptized by John, even though it made no sense to the other man.

And then, as he came out of the water, heaven was opened. The Holy Spirit came down in the form of a dove. And the voice of God the Father was heard from above: "This is my Son, whom I love. With him I am well pleased."

It's a dramatic scene. Certainly more than enough to get everyone's attention. And Matthew recounts the sights and sounds of the event quite vividly.

Today, we get the Apostle John's version of Jesus' baptism. But John, as is his usual style, can't just stick to the simple "who, what, where" facts. No, John has to make it difficult. He has to be poetic and theological. He has to give us the substance, the meaning, of the event without being weighed down by things like details or chronological order.

And so instead of telling us directly about Jesus' Baptism, he tells us about John the Baptist telling John's disciples about Jesus' baptism. Like I said, the whole thing is a little peculiar and a little confusing. What we get, though, is actually quite important and unique.

Because going this convoluted route allows us to get a glimpse into not simply what happened at Jesus' baptism, but what John the Baptist thinks about it all. And John's opinion is kind of important. John the Baptist is the very first person to recognize Jesus as the Son of God. And he does it while he's still in the womb, before he's even born.

And after he's born, he continues to recognize Jesus' identity when no one else does. John the Baptist is not just a great prophet. Jesus calls John the greatest human being to ever walk the earth. That's a pretty impressive title, especially coming from the Son of God. And it should get our attention.

So, having baptized Jesus. Having witnessed this amazing epiphany. What is John's reaction? Well, first and foremost, he now calls Jesus the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Think about that title for a moment. The Lamb of God. Maybe it'd be helpful to flip it around into the possessive form. Behold God's Lamb. Not your lamb. Not my lamb. God's Lamb. This person belongs to God. This person is God. The world has no claim on Jesus.

And yet He is here to take away the world's sin. God's Lamb has been sent to be sacrificed as your lamb and my lamb. So that the wrath of God might pass over us. Just like the Passover lamb once did for the Israelites in Egypt.

That's how John sees Jesus. The moment Jesus comes out of the water, John looks at him and says, "Wow... you are the greatest gift God has ever given humanity. And you are going to die. And there is nothing that any of us can do to change that." It's no wonder that John keeps calling him the "Lamb of God" every time he sees Jesus. John is simply awestruck by what Jesus has come to do.

But how did he know that Jesus was this Lamb of God? Was it like that moment I mentioned earlier? When John jumped in the womb at the sound of Mary's voice? When he just somehow knew, without explanation, that this was the Son of God? According to John, not at all.

No, John actually admits to a fair amount of doubt at first about who Jesus is. Which is one of the many reasons why Jesus insists upon being baptized. Because if a prophet like John the Baptist can fail to fully recognize Jesus at first glance, then anyone can. Jesus needs to prove his identity. To John. To John's disciples. To us.

And the amazing events surrounding Jesus' baptism help do that. I mean, how many of you, if you were there, would hesitate to believe that Jesus was at least someone pretty important?

Heaven is opened up. I don't even really know what that means. But it sounds pretty impressive. When heaven and earth meet, it tends to get people's attention. Add to that the voice of God the Father, appearing out of nowhere, booming through the Jordan valley in a way that I can't even imagine. You can't ignore these kinds of events.

And yet, John points to neither of these signs as proof of Jesus' identity. He doesn't even consider them worth mentioning. No, all that John cares about is the dove. The Holy Spirit descending from heaven and coming to rest on Jesus.

That gets John's attention. Because God had told him, in no uncertain terms, that when you see that, you know you are looking at the Son of God. The one anointed by God is the one anointed by God's Spirit. The one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit is the one baptized with the Holy Spirit. That is John's ultimate proof. That is our ultimate proof.

But John mentions something in the course of all this that I find interesting. He says it twice, actually, which is what makes it so conspicuous. He says, "*I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him.*" A little later, he repeats it, "*He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.*"

The dove remained on him. I'm not sure what I assumed happened there. The Spirit comes down like a dove, lands on Jesus, and then... poof? He evaporates? Vanishes into thin air? I don't know. It doesn't really matter because that's not what happens.

The dove remains on Jesus. The Spirit remains on Jesus. And the picture that John paints almost makes it sound like he still sees that dove sitting on Jesus' shoulder. Remaining on him. Day after day. Jesus' baptism as an event may have only lasted a moment, but his anointing with the Holy Spirit is permanent. The Spirit remains on him. Just as the Spirit remains on you.

It reminds me a little of the movie Pinocchio. You know my wife and I are Disney fanatics. And I've always been fond of little Jiminy Cricket. Sitting on Pinocchio's shoulder. Desperately trying to be his conscience. Desperately trying to keep him from doing all sorts of foolish things.

The Holy Spirit is often described like that. As our conscience. Teaching us right and wrong. Warning us when we stray into sin and temptation.

But I think the parallel is even more prominent than that. Because Jiminy Cricket was not just Pinocchio's conscience. He was Pinocchio's friend. His best friend. The only one, beside his father, looking out for Pinocchio's best interests. The only one who would stick by Pinocchio's side through thick and thin. Jiminy Cricket sat on Pinocchio's shoulder as the best, most loyal friend and companion that anyone could ever ask for.

And that is also a really amazing description of what the Holy Spirit is for us. Jesus walked through this life really, really alone. The Pharisees hated him. The crowds ultimately rejected him. His own disciples never really understood him until the very end. And yet, Jesus is never lonely. In fact, one of his favorite activities was to go into solitary, lonely places in order to pray.

Jesus wasn't lonely because he was never alone. He faced everything that this sinful world could throw at him with the Holy Spirit sitting on his shoulder. He accepted every cup of suffering that the Father handed him, to the point of death itself, with the Spirit resting firmly upon him. Remaining there. Day after day.

We, as Christians, have no need to feel lonely because we are never alone. We face everything this sinful world can throw at us with the Holy Spirit sitting on our shoulder. We accept every cup of suffering that the Father hands to us, to the point of death itself, with the Spirit resting firmly upon us. Remaining there. Day after day.

As Paul tells us in our Epistle, we are not lacking in any gift. No matter how helpless we may sometimes feel. No matter how guilty our conscience may weigh upon us. No matter how we may struggle against this world of sin and death.

We lack nothing, because we are baptized. We lack nothing, because God's Spirit remains on us. We lack nothing, because God himself walks with us every day. Forgiving us. Strengthening us. And reminding us that the struggle against sin and death is not ours to fight. It was fought and won by the Lamb of God. Who takes away the sin of the world.

God's Lamb, whose death took away your sin and my sin. Who gives us His very flesh and blood for our forgiveness. And through whom the Holy Spirit comes to us. Remains on us. Lives within us. To the very end of the age. Amen.