*DEVOTIONAL*

January 7 - 12

*Come, Follow Me*

**Monday, January 7 John 1:19-23**

*“This was John’s testimony”*

John’s baptizing activity at the Jordan River led a delegation sent by the Jewish religious leaders to question the Baptist as to his identity. (1) John denies that he is the Christ (“Christ” is a Greek translation of the Hebrew word for “Messiah”), someone filled with God’s power and Spirit who would work some saving miracle on behalf of God’s people. (2) Malachi 4:5 (an Old Testament book) taught that the prophet Elijah would precede the coming Messiah. If John were not the Messiah, perhaps then he was Elijah. Because Elijah had been taken from the earth without dying (2 Kings 2:11), Jewish speculation proposed that he was mysteriously alive and would return at the end of time. John says clearly he is not Elijah.

(3) “The Prophet” is likely a reference to Deuteronomy 18:15-19, where a prophet “like Moses” would return to Israel sometimes in the future. Again, John’s answer is succinct: No. Following this series of denials John identifies who he is by quoting Isaiah 40:3 and declaring his role as the one who prepares the way for Jesus’ ministry.

*May what I say and how I live, Lord, point to my devotion to you. Amen.*

**Tuesday, January 8 John 1:24-28**

*“I am not worthy”*

Judaism knew about ritual washings for ceremonial cleansing. But baptism was reserved for Gentiles who had converted to Judaism by being circumcised and committing themselves to follow the laws of Moses. It was a total cleansing that marked a threshold crossed. John, however, was calling *Jews* to be baptized, and of course this prompted the questions: “What is the threshold that you are telling us Jews that we need to cross? What is the new order that would change us as Jews?”

The promise on the horizon is not a new religion or a different way of practicing the Jewish religion but a relationship with a person who, as yet, is unknown to these who come inquiring. John describes him as so great that by comparison, he (though a prophet) will be less than a slave. Untying a sandal thong was a chore never done by disciples for their teacher. Rather, it was a chore reserved for slaves. John says he is unworthy even to do the work of a slave for this One who is coming.

*I know I am not worthy, Jesus, but you love me anyway. Amen.*

**Wednesday, January 9 John 1:29-34**

*“The Lamb of God”*

This encounter on “the next day” is a continuation of John the Baptist’s testimony to Jesus. While previously John could only hint at the coming of Christ, now he identifies Christ plainly. His knowledge of the coming one was not *innate knowledge –* it was not something he had figured out on his own. It was knowledge that had come to him through revelation – when the Spirit descended on Jesus. True knowledge of God is beyond human reach. It is a gift of divine disclosure that allows John to speak directly of the identity and purpose of Jesus.

John identifies Jesus as “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.” Jesus is a gift provided by God to take away sin. As a lamb he becomes a sacrifice whose death take away our sin condition that is prohibited in the presence of God. John also clearly identifies Jesus as one on whom the Spirit rests. Rather than tell the fuller story of Jesus’ baptism (as do the other three gospels), John’s gospel simply has the Baptist describe what he witnessed that day in the Jordan: the coming of the Spirit on Christ.

*Sacrificing yourself for me, Jesus, you have taken away my sin. Amen.*

*DEVOTIONAL*

January 7 - 12

*Come, Follow Me*

**Thursday, January 10 John 1:35-42**

*“They followed Jesus”*

John the Baptist continues the role as witness to Jesus by speaking to his own followers, directing them to follow Jesus instead of him. We are told that one of the two disciples is Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. Andrew finds his brother and brings him to Jesus. On one level, the story serves to show that disciples who followed the Baptist must shift their allegiance to Jesus. On another level, the story provides a pattern for being committed to Jesus, using the language of discipleship.

Two disciples hear John testify to Jesus and they follow him. When asked about their interests by him (“What do you want?”) they ask where he is staying (or remaining). “Come . . . and you will see,” he replies. This language is deliberately designed to describe discipleship: to “follow,” to “come and see,” and to “stay, remain” each describes aspects of being a faithful disciple of Jesus. The same pattern of discipleship is played out with Philip and Nathanael in the following section.

*May I bring others to meet you, Lord, that they too might follow you. Amen.*

**Friday, January 11 John 1:43-51**

*“I saw you . . . before Philip called you”*

Jesus’ decision to move to Galilee (about a hundred miles north) where he calls Philip and Nathanael was not as abrupt as the story suggests. John is moving us from one snapshot to the next, from one frame to another, introducing us to more characters who play a vital role in the Gospel story about Jesus and what it means to follow him. Like Andrew did with Peter, Philip brings another to Jesus. Converts make new converts. They speak what they know about Jesus and they bring other people along so that they too will “come and see.”

John knows that the process of discipleship and conversion are not matters left in human hands. Nathanael must “come and see,” but Jesus has “seen” him already. “I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you.” These are remarkable words that point to Jesus’ supernatural knowledge, but also to God’s sovereign awareness of those who will accept the light. God sees us before we see him. God will “come and see” us before we ever think about discipleship. God makes his overture before we consider making our own.

*Before I was even born you knew me, Lord, and you chose to call me. Amen.*

**Saturday, January 12 Matthew 3:13-17**

*“Then Jesus came to be baptized by John”*

We might have expected the Messiah to go to Jerusalem, claiming the throne of David and the temple of Solomon. Or perhaps he would come out of the desert as a military conqueror, like the ancient warrior David, or with prophetic authority, like John himself. Instead, Matthew says simply, “Then Jesus arrived from Galilee.” He comes as a solitary figure from the insignificant agricultural region of the nation.

Perhaps the most unlikely feature of this event is that Jesus asks to be baptized by John, like any of the rest of the crowd. Even John seems surprised, as he tries to stop Jesus from being baptized. So, why does Jesus want to be baptized? As Jesus goes into the waters of baptism, he identifies with his people in their need; that is, he identifies with the sinful humanity he has come to save. Jesus could have chosen to be up there in front standing with John and calling on sinners to repent. Instead, although he was himself without sin, he chose to be down there with the sinners, affirming his identification with them.

*Your love, Jesus, welcomes a sinner like me. Amen.*