# Congregational-Presbyterian Church

 **“Come, Follow Me”**

**John 1:35-51**

**January 13, 2019**

Last Sunday we began our sermon series on Jesus in John’s Gospel. We said that John’s purpose in writing his gospel is that we may get to know Jesus, believe in Jesus, and accept him as our Lord and Savior, thereby receiving God’s gift of eternal life. So, “Who is Jesus?” Last week we saw in the first eighteen verses of chapter one how John spoke of Jesus eternally, effectively, and visibly. Eternally, Jesus is God. He is the Son of God and he is the Word of God through whom the Father created all that exists, including you and me. Effectively, Jesus bridges the gap between us and God, the gap created by our sinful disobedience of God’s will for us, and he brings us into a right relationship with God. Visibly, Jesus displays the glory of God’s unfailing love and faithfulness, showing by his words and actions these wonderful attributes of God that God wants us to experience.

As we turn once again to the first chapter of John, we will read verses thirty-five through fifty-one this morning. The question is still, “Who is Jesus?” In these verses, John tells us that Jesus is a Lamb, Jesus is a Leader, and Jesus is a Ladder.

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. Jesus looked around and saw them following. “What do you want?” he asked them. They replied, “Rabbi” (which means “Teacher”), “where are you staying?” “Come and see,” he said. It was about four o’clock in the afternoon when they went with him to the place where he was staying, and they remained with him the rest of the day. 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”). Then Andrew brought Simon to meet Jesus. Looking intently at Simon, Jesus said, “Your name is Simon, son of John—but you will be called Cephas” (which means “Peter”). The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Come, follow me.” Philip was from Bethsaida, Andrew and Peter’s hometown. Philip went to look for Nathanael and told him, “We have found the very person Moses and the prophets wrote about! His name is Jesus, the son of Joseph from Nazareth.” “Nazareth!” exclaimed Nathanael. “Can anything good come from Nazareth?” “Come and see for yourself,” Philip replied. As they approached, Jesus said, “Now here is a genuine son of Israel—a man of complete integrity.” “How do you know about me?” Nathanael asked. Jesus replied, “I could see you under the fig tree before Philip found you.” Then Nathanael exclaimed, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God—the King of Israel!” Jesus asked him, “Do you believe this just because I told you I had seen you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than this.” Then he said, “I tell you the truth, you will all see heaven open and the angels of God going up and down on the Son of Man, the one who is the stairway between heaven and earth.”

When they heard John name Jesus “the Lamb of God,” the two disciples left John and followed Jesus. John understood that the first problem that we humans must settle with God is the problem of sin. The only real access we have to the Living God is through the doorway of forgiveness of sin. We will never know Jesus until we know him as the Lamb of God who takes away our sin, the one who went as a willing sacrifice to the cross and shed his blood. These two disciples, one of which we are told is Andrew, are invited by Jesus to spend the day with him. I’m sure one of their topics of conversation was initiated by the question, “What does it mean, Jesus, when the Baptist calls you the Lamb of God?”

Having spent time with the Lamb of God, Andrew went to find his brother, Simon, and brought him to Jesus. In this encounter with Simon, we see that Jesus is not only the Lamb who takes away our sin, but is also the Shepherd who leads those he saves. Like all good leaders, Jesus has a vision, a plan for the future and a way for those whom he leads to be a part of that plan. Looking intently at Simon, Jesus read his heart and knew that he would one day be the strong spokesperson for the early church. “You are Simon . . . I will call you ‘the Rock’ because that is what you will become under my leadership.”

Jesus shows who he is in his meeting with Philip. For him to say to Philip, “Follow me,” is to establish himself as a leader, as one worthy of being followed. And, with Nathanael, a reluctant critic who at first wants nothing to do with someone from Nazareth, Jesus is able to overcome Nathanael’s skepticism and yet another person begins to follow their new leader.

“Who is Jesus?” He is the Lamb of God who becomes the leader of those who follow him. That brings us to the most puzzling thing that Jesus says in these verses: “You will all see heaven open and the angels of God going up and down on the Son of Man, the one who is the stairway between heaven and earth.”

There was a rock band that came on the scene in the early 1970s by the name of Led Zeppelin. They became one of the most popular rock bands of their era, and the song they were best known for was called “Stairway to Heaven.” You may remember the refrain: “. . . and she’s buying a stairway to heaven.” The song talks about a woman who thinks her happiness lies in money, who believes that money will buy her a stairway to heaven. She wants to escape the mundane and painful existence of everyday living, and she thinks riches will do it for her. We all share this desire to be rid of problems, to be free from heartache and sadness, to live in eternal happiness. But, money won’t get us there. Neither will trying to live a good, moral life. Nor will practicing the legal requirements of a particular religion. The only way for us to get to heaven is by the stairway of the one who calls himself the Son of Man. Jesus is our ladder.

In this verse, Jesus is referring back to a time in the life of Jacob in the Old Testament. In Genesis chapter 28 we read that Jacob had deceived his father, Isaac, and stolen the blessing that rightfully belonged to his older brother, Esau. Esau is enraged and threatens to kill Jacob, so Jacob is forced to flee. Exhausted from running all day, he lays down and falls asleep. He has a dream in which he sees a ladder with its bottom step on earth and its top reaching into heaven. On the ladder, the angels of God are ascending and descending, bringing God’s glory to the world. The ladder connects heaven and earth, God and humanity.

Jesus is saying that Jacob’s ladder is a pictorial representation of himself. He is the ladder who connects heaven and earth, God and humanity. It is he who has opened heaven for us, through whom we have access to God. He is the go-between, the mediator, who connects sinful humanity to a holy God through himself.

Led Zeppelin’s song sadly represents the different stairways that people turn to, each one promising happiness but each one leading only to misery and eventually to eternal separation from God. Jesus is the only ladder to God. “I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father but by me” Jesus says later in John’s gospel. He is the Lamb who has taken away our sin on the cross, he is our leader who guides us into the vision he has for us as the children of God, and he is our ladder who has opened heaven for us that we may enter. “Come, follow me,” says Jesus, “And together we will discover what it means for you and for your relationship with God that I am your Lamb, that I am your leader, and that I am your ladder to heaven.”