

The next day John was there again with two of his disciples.³⁶ When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, “Look, the Lamb of God!”

³⁷ When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus.³⁸ Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, “What do you want?”

They said, “Rabbi” (which means Teacher), “where are you staying?”

³⁹ “Come,” he replied, “and you will see.”

So they went and saw where he was staying, and spent that day with him. It was about the tenth hour.

⁴⁰ Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus.⁴¹ The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, “We have found the Messiah” (that is, the Christ).⁴² And he brought him to Jesus.

Jesus looked at him and said, “You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas” (which, when translated, is Peter). (John 1:35-42)

Come and You Will See!

What did you do on Friday? Did you drag yourself out of bed and get to your favorite store by 5 a.m.? Were you camped out on the sidewalk the night before to be first in line on Friday morning? No one from my family was. You couldn’t drag us to a mall or a department store on Black Friday. But like it or not, the Christmas shopping season began on Friday. In many people’s minds, that means that the Christmas season began then, too. So some radio stations have changed over to the all Christmas song format. You can’t go to a store without hearing Christmas carols. Christmas lights and Christmas trees are going up all over. And of course, in the church, the season of Advent starts today.

In many people’s minds, Advent is the beginning of the Christmas season. Certainly, there is an undeniable link. But the “Twelve Days of Christmas” don’t start until Christmas Day. In the church, the Christmas season actually comes after Christmas. But with our month long run up to Christmas, many of us are pretty much “Christmased out” by December 25th, so Advent stands in for the Christmas season. Yet in the church year, Advent has a somewhat different flavor. It’s about anticipation and expectation. Advent means “coming”—Jesus coming. That is the connection to Christmas. But Advent focuses on more than just the coming in Bethlehem. It looks forward to his coming at the end of time. And it also reminds us of how Jesus comes into our hearts through the gospel. Today, the Feast of St. Andrew, that coming into our hearts is very much on display. To echo the words of Jesus himself, **Come and you will see!**

I.

At the very beginning of his ministry – in fact just two days after Jesus was baptized – John the Baptist pointed him out to two of his own disciples and said, **“Look, the Lamb of God!”** The day before, he had said the longer version, **“Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”** John was pointing out the Savior. But who was he talking to? Their names were Andrew and John, the future apostle. But who were they really? Were they robbers and thieves? Were they the down and out of society? Were they men who lived openly sinful lives and needed to change them? No. Andrew and John were fishermen. They were “unschooled.” But they were not the dregs of society. In point of fact, they were both religious men. They were disciples of John the Baptist. They were students studying under a famous, if very unorthodox, rabbi. We never hear whether they intended to become teachers themselves. But they had not left their jobs yet. So it may well be that they were sincere Jewish believers who were glad to have a teacher like John the Baptist, but who had no real thought of entering the ministry themselves. If that’s true, then these men were very much like you. They were church going, faithful people.

To them, John pointed out the Lamb of God. To them, Jesus extended the invitation to come and see. Does that mean that they weren’t believers yet? Does it mean that they still needed to have some kind of conversion experience? No. Their situation was different from ours in one important respect: they knew a Savior was coming – the Messiah – and they believed in him. But they didn’t know who he was. John was showing them the answer.

Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Now, what does that mean? To understand the answer, you have to understand the way God's people worshipped in the Old Testament and right through the end of Jesus' life. God commanded rituals and sacrifices for Israel. They made Old Testament worship radically different from our worship. Old Testament worship overwhelmed the senses. In virtually every rite, there was a sacrifice. They killed an animal and drained its blood. In some cases, they ate part of it. But in every case, they burned at least part and sometimes all of that animal. Think about the smell and the smoke and time involved! But the key element was blood. They poured the blood out in front of the altar. Sometimes, they smeared it on the horns of the altar. In some rituals, they even threw blood out onto the crowd. Why? The blood removed their sin. These Jewish disciples had seen God make this equation all their lives: the only way to get rid of sin is with blood, the blood of a substitute, the blood of one who has to die in your place. When John called Jesus the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, those Jewish people immediately thought of the sacrifices God commanded to take away their sin.

Now, no animal blood could really wash away human guilt. Our sin takes greater blood than that. When I was growing up, daytime television was dominated by commercials for household cleaning products. I still remember the detergent commercials. They all were a variation on the same theme: compare our detergent with our competitors. See! Ours really washes the stain away! The only detergent that could wash away the stain of our sin is the blood of Christ. None of those animals could do the job. But they all did serve a purpose: they prepared God's people to understand that the blood of Christ, shed for us, really does wash all our sin away. That's what John was telling his disciples that day.

That's what the Church still proclaims to this day. It's what we need to hear, over and over again. This time of year, it's easy for us to lose sight of that. This is such a busy time. December is probably the most stressful month of the year for most of us. All that holiday planning and shopping. Fighting with crowds. Worrying about spending too much. Finding the time to get the house cleaned before family arrives. We put pressure on ourselves because we have this image in our heads of a perfect Hallmark Christmas. In all the stress and fuss and worry, it's easy to steal an extra hour or two on Sunday morning. After all, we need our rest. It's easy for us to put the Lamb of God in second place behind all that other stuff.

Our priorities tell who our God is. You would think that at this time of year, when we celebrate the coming of Christ, the priority would be coming and seeing him, wouldn't you? But that isn't always the case. One of the biggest frustrations that I and our teachers share is parents who send their children to our Lutheran elementary school, but then undermine what we're teaching them because they don't show up here, or worse, they go to a non-Lutheran church, which always means a church which doesn't present Jesus as the Lamb of God with the same clarity and intensity. This time of year – in truth, in every time of year – it's so easy to make many other things more important than coming and seeing the Lamb of God. When we do that, we're making those things our god. We can say all we want that Jesus is more important. But actions speak louder than words.

My friends, it is idol worship to put anything ahead of God. That sin must be paid for in blood, our blood. But God replaced our blood with the blood of Jesus. That's why those Old Testament rituals were so gruesome. They were filled with blood not to horrify us, but to comfort us. Jesus is the Lamb of God. His blood has taken away the sin of the world. It has taken away our sin. Jesus died to erase all the idolatry that you and I have ever been guilty of. Jesus died because our hearts naturally put other things ahead of God. He died and God has bleached us white. We are now holy in his sight.

Jesus comes into our hearts when we hear that gospel. Most of the time, that involves us coming. We come to church. We come to communion. We come to the font and bring a baby with us to be baptized. We come to the dinner table and read Bible stories to our children. We come to our bedside table and read God's Word for ourselves. But our coming isn't the power; that's just "showing up." The real coming is Christ moving through the word to enter our hearts. **Come and you will see the Lamb of God!**

II.

Advent is about Jesus coming to us. He comes into our hearts in the word and the sacrament and he renews our faith. But Advent comes back every year because we don't just learn that once and then we're good. We live in a sinful world that actively tries to distract us from what's important and then convince us that we don't need it. We all have sinful hearts that want to believe that we religious people are OK. We've checked off the boxes and taken care of all the stuff on God's list of requirements to get into heaven. My friends, we

church going people need to keep on learning about Jesus all our lives. That's why year after year, we follow this cycle of Advent and Christmas and Lent and Easter – we follow Jesus through his life and death and life again because he teaches us through the gospel story. My friends, **come and you will see the great Teacher.**

When John pointed Jesus out, Andrew and the other John followed him. Jesus asked them what they wanted. They asked kind of odd sounding question, **“Rabbi, where are you staying?”** They were fishing for an invitation. Jesus told them, **“Come, and you will see.”** They spent the whole day with him. Now, what do you think they were doing? They were talking to him. They were learning from him. When the day was over, Andrew found his brother, Simon Peter, and said, **“We have found the Messiah!”**

Andrew and John and Peter took time from their busy lives to be with Jesus and to study the Scriptures. Certainly, they did not understand his work very well at this point. They had no clear conception that the Lamb of God was going to die, even though that should've clear from the temple sacrifices. But they did recognize their Savior. They did the only thing that would increase their understanding and their faith: they came and sat at Jesus' feet and learned from him.

Doesn't that sound like a wonderful opportunity? Or does it also sound like a pipe dream? Who has time for that today? The devil has achieved tremendous success in the Church today. On the one hand, we complain that modern life doesn't leave enough room for studying the Bible, at home or at church. There're too many things in the way and we're just too tired. On the other hand, we wring our hands over how many of our children don't come back after they're confirmed, about how difficult our financial situation is at church, about how unmotivated and uncommitted our members are. My friends, these two things go together. Only the gospel can make us strong and committed members of Christ's church and our local congregation. If we parents are unwilling to talk to our own children about Jesus, how are we ever going to talk to strangers? If we fathers and mothers don't put the word ahead of other activities and opportunities for our children, how will they ever learn to treasure that word enough to come and hear it? If they don't hear it, they will never grow to be active and committed servants of God.

Andrew heard the word. The gospel moved him to find his brother and share the good news with him. The gospel moved all these men to live different lives than they would've lived otherwise. The gospel is still the power of God. With it, our lives and the lives of our children will be different than they would be without it. Our job as parents is not to change our children's lives. It's not to give them faith. Our job as parents is to bring them to hear the word. Through that word, Jesus will come into their hearts again and again and he will change their lives. Our job as individuals is to come and hear the word. When we come, we will see Jesus. He will grow our faith and knowledge of him. He will change our lives and teach us new priorities.

God's promise to us is that the gospel is powerful. That gospel announces eternal forgiveness for all the times we parents failed in our number one responsibility toward our children. Jesus died because we haven't been perfect in bringing our children to him. The gospel announces that God forgives us even for our own failure to come and hear and see him. God has washed all that sin away. Now, God calls us to come and hear. To come to communion. To come with our children to baptism. To come to his word together as families in our homes and individually when we read the Bible. God calls us to come. He promises that when we come to the gospel, we will see Jesus. He will lift up our hearts and comfort us over our sin. He will strengthen us to go out and be lights in the darkness, so that many more people come to see their Savior. Come and you will see Jesus this Advent season. Amen.