

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

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

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

*<sup>39</sup> “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.*

*<sup>40</sup> Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. <sup>41</sup> The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, “We have found the Messiah” (that is, the Christ). (John 1:35-41)*

### A Small Stone Can Start an Avalanche

They say that one stone can start an avalanche. Now, I’ve never lived in the mountains, so I don’t know how true that really is. But I like the image. You stand at the top of the mountain and you throw a stone. And it knocks another couple of stones free and those knock a few more stones free. By the time you get to the bottom, that one stone has become a roaring avalanche that uproots trees and sweeps away houses. I like that image for the church, because that’s what I think God is showing us this morning in our gospel lesson. John the Baptist and Jesus do very simple things, things that no one would even remember if God hadn’t used them to build his church, which is an avalanche that sweeps up unbelievers and brings them all the way to eternal life. Yet, the miracles that make that avalanche happen are so subtle, the world around us misses them over and over again. We are part of those miracles. Our lives show that **a small stone can start an avalanche.**

#### I.

**John the Baptist threw a stone.** That’s what we see in our gospel lesson this morning. It picks up where last week’s sermon text ended. In that reading, John pointed to Jesus and said, **“Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”** The very next day, John and two of his disciples saw Jesus. John said almost the exact same thing: **“Look, the Lamb of God!”** You can think of what John did in very ordinary terms. Essentially, he told these two men, “You need to talk to him.” We do that kind of thing all the time, don’t we? You take your car into the dealership for service and someone points you to the desk and says, “You need to see that guy over there.” You need to have some work done at your house, and a friend tells you to call the plumber they used. When we do that, we’re pointing someone to the right person to take care of their needs. That’s what John the Baptist was doing.

But John threw a stone that day that started an avalanche that continues to this very day. One of the men he sent to talk to Jesus was Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter. Our gospel lesson doesn’t tell us the name of the other one – but it was probably the apostle John himself, the writer of this lesson. What did they do? They followed Jesus. After a few minutes, Jesus turned and asked them what they wanted and they seem to have had a little trouble starting the conversation. Maybe it felt awkward to say, “So what about this Lamb of God stuff?” So they asked where Jesus was staying. He invited them to come and see and they spent the rest of the day with him. What did they talk about? Obviously, that Lamb of God stuff. Afterward the very first thing Andrew did was go and tell his brother Peter that they had found the Messiah. What happened then? Several weeks later, Jesus was walking by the shore of the Sea of Galilee and he passed Andrew and Peter fishing and he said, **“Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.”** And they did! He walked a little further and found James and John working on their fishing boats. He called them and they left their father and the servants and became Jesus’ disciples.

And more stones followed. Jesus called eight more disciples. Jesus traveled around Galilee preaching and teaching and doing miracles. Then he went south again to Judea and Jerusalem and he did the same. Crowds followed him everywhere he went. The avalanche was getting bigger. The bigger it got, the more it annoyed the Jewish religious leaders, so they argued with him and attacked him and spread rumors about him. They plotted against him and finally murdered him. But that didn’t even slow down the avalanche. It made it greater because that’s what was supposed to happen. Jesus died and paid for all the sins of all the world. Then

he rose. He appeared to his disciples and gave them the Holy Spirit so that they finally began to understand what had really happened. Then he ascended into heaven.

So finally, the avalanche had to slow down, once Jesus was gone, right? No! He sent the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and the New Testament Church exploded onto the scene. Within a generation, the faith had traveled throughout the Roman Empire. Within three centuries, it was the dominant religion in the Mediterranean world. And that avalanche just keeps going. It has swept all around the world and it has reached us. You and I are here today because John the Baptist did what God wanted him to do: he threw that rock and Andrew and John went to talk to Jesus. And that avalanche will continue until it sweeps up all the elect. It will continue until Jesus returns and uproots all sin and evil and sends all sinners to hell. That avalanche will only end when Jesus sweeps away the world as we know it and gives us the new heaven and the new earth and we will live with him forever. That avalanche is what we are living today.

## II.

What makes that avalanche so powerful? Nothing more or less than the gospel. That's what really sweeps people into the kingdom of God. In the Garden of Eden God promised to send a Savior. God controlled all of history and created the people of Israel. When the time was right, the Holy Spirit descended in power on the Virgin Mary and she conceived a child in her womb. The Son of God took on human flesh and he lived in our place. He was perfect like we can never be. He died to pay for all our sins. Then he rose to declare that the whole world is paid for. But if that message does not reach us, we cannot trust in it. So God created the church and its ministry. Jesus himself was the first New Testament preacher. And he passed that work along to his disciples. God founded the church on the gospel they proclaimed. They passed the work on to generation after generation of Christian people and Christian ministers. Sure, a great deal of false doctrine and unhealthy practice crept in over the years. But the Holy Spirit worked and reformed and preserved and brought the gospel to us. Every time the gospel dislodged another stone and added it to the avalanche, God changed a heart. That, too, is what we see this morning in this very simple, ordinary series of events. **A small stone can start an avalanche. Jesus threw a stone.**

Andrew and John and Peter and James were already Old Testament believers. But when they met the Savior who had actually come, everything changed for them. That's why Andrew ran back and told his brother what they had found. What made such a profound impact on Andrew's heart? Well, it's hard to be specific because the Bible doesn't tell us what they said that afternoon. And over the next three years all twelve of the disciples were going to demonstrate immaturity and lack of understanding on multiple occasions. But what we can say is that gospel worked in their hearts. It worked that day and it worked steadily over the next three years and for the rest of their lives. It does the same to us. Jesus is the solution to the problem of sin and guilt. And he is the solution to all the problems that sin brings into our lives.

We all wrestle with sin and what it does to us. Some of us may wrestle directly with guilt. If you're like me, sometimes you'll be thinking about something else and you'll remember something you did – some thoughtless comment to your spouse, some rebellious moment in your youth, some truly evil thing that you keep secret and don't want anyone else to know. That memory stabs at your heart. What you're feeling is guilt. You know you did evil and you're embarrassed and truly, you're afraid. Whether you think it all the way through to the end or not, in the last analysis, what you fear is hell.

Others of us might wrestle more with the effects of sin. Again, like me and my family, you may be mourning the loss of someone you loved. Death comes from sin. Even when we're confident that our loved ones are with Jesus, losing them still hurts. Or you may have other hurts. Jesus dealt with people who were sick and dying. Jesus dealt with people who were possessed by the devil. Jesus dealt with people who were poor and hungry and had to beg for food. Jesus dealt with people who were unpopular in their society. All those things come from sin and all of them still exist in our society. At least some of us have to face those hurts while we're here.

Jesus is the answer. He threw that rock when he spent the afternoon with Andrew and John to share the good news them and make them part of the avalanche. To this day, he calls us here again and again to hear that message. He lived in our place. God counts his perfect life as ours and he ignores the sins that flow out of our sinful hearts into our sinful lives. Jesus died and paid for every sin in our thoughts and desires and words and deeds. His blood washes our lives clean. The Bible compares it to bleach that leaves us as white as snow. Jesus

rose to declare that God himself is satisfied with that payment. Jesus rose to promise us that we will live with him in heaven and we will rise from the dead. That forgiveness and that promise of life give us hope here.

That gospel changes us, so that we can view the hurts and sorrows of this life differently. We trust what our God is doing and know that he loves us even when we don't understand. We pray and ask him to help us with all those things. And God hears and answers every one of those prayers. We look forward to heaven, where all pain and sorrow cease. And we pray with St. Paul, "Amen, come, Lord Jesus!" because we know that when the Lord comes again, all the hurt of this life will be erased and all believers will rejoice together in Christ and live in a perfect world with him forever. That gospel is the power of God that causes the avalanche.

And every time we hear that message, every time we sit down with our pastor and pour out all that troubles us and he personally applies God's love to our lives, Jesus is throwing a stone just like he did that afternoon. When Jesus spent the afternoon talking with Andrew and John, they didn't know how God was going to use them in his church. But Jesus did. When he spoke with them, he was also thinking about us. He was thinking about the pastors who baptized us and confirmed us. He was thinking about the Sunday school teachers and Lutheran elementary school teachers and high school teachers who would walk us through the scriptures. He was thinking about the Christian parents who taught us to sing, "Jesus Loves Me, This I Know" and who read Bible stories to us and who brought us to the font and to church. He knew that day that we would gather here today to hear this gospel message. And Jesus was thinking about those Christians that we have loved and lost. He was planning for the gospel to sweep them up and carry them home to heaven.

And he was thinking about all the ways that he would use you and me to make that avalanche bigger. We bring our children to the font and to church. We support the work of our congregation through our prayers and our offerings and our gifts of time and abilities. We pray for and support the work of our synod as it trains pastors and teachers and sends them all over the United States and throughout the world. And we personally share our faith. We talk about it with our kids. We reflect it in our lives at work and at play. We are ready to give an answer to everyone who asks about the hope that we have. And the Holy Spirit uses us to knock more stones loose and make them part of that avalanche.

Who knows what God will use to make a difference? What simple words that we speak will touch a heart? This week, one of our members told me about her sister who was troubled and angry after their father died. They had a brief exchange one Sunday in church. Our member almost didn't remember it, it was so ordinary. But God struck her sister's heart with her words and used them to give her healing and comfort. Our member didn't plan for that. She didn't lay awake at night trying to think of the right words to make that happen. Years before, Jesus had simply added her to the avalanche. And when the time was right, he used her. Just like he uses us, over and over again, to sweep away tears and bring comfort, to confront sin and bring repentance, to encourage and strengthen and add to the avalanche. You and I are small stones. But Jesus is working in the gospel through us and for us. Trust his work and joyfully be a part of it. Amen.