

John 1: 29-42 Notice, Share, Invite

These are the words used to introduce a commentary on the text from John's gospel which I read a few minutes ago. The words remind me of what we are called to do in the great commission as found at the end of Matthew. We are called to make disciples; to be ones spreading the good news. In this passage we have a unique description of how Jesus called his first disciples. And perhaps a model for how we are to fulfill the commission given to us. In the synoptic gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, Jesus' baptism is followed by descriptions of Jesus being sent into the wilderness where he encounters and is tempted by Satan. John's entire view of Jesus is different—focusing much more on the divinity of Jesus than on the bodily incarnation of the divine. Through John's gospel we do not see much of the human nature of Jesus. This morning's text describes the testimony of John the Baptist as to Jesus' identity as the Son of God. The preceding passage describes John the Baptist as the voice crying out in the wilderness call for repentance. This repentance is to prepare the way for the Lord who is coming soon. John is very clear that he is not the Messiah, nor is he the prophet Elijah. There by the Jordan he calls for repentance, a return to God's way and offers a cleansing through baptism with water. This is all in preparation for the soon to arrive Messiah who will initiate God's reign. After this declaration to the religious leaders who have come to question him, the next day John sees Jesus approaching and proclaims: "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." This is the opening of our text for today. John testifies that he saw the Spirit descend upon Jesus and that Jesus is the Son of God. Within this account, John the Baptist is not actually described as baptizing Jesus, only recognizing him. Within this testimony as to Jesus' identity there is a puzzling statement. After describing the Spirit's descent and remaining on Jesus as Jesus was named as God's son, John adds this: "I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit. And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God.'" In the gospel of Luke we are told that John's mother Elizabeth and Jesus' mother Mary are related. Not only that but that Elizabeth testifies that Mary is the mother of her Lord and "the child in my womb leaped for joy" when Mary goes to visit her. If John in the womb recognized Jesus who was also still in the womb, what has occurred in the meantime. What does it then mean when John now says "I myself did not know him." Surely they had known each other as boys. But evidently, it was not all that obvious to John who Jesus was. How is it that it is when they are both about thirty years old, John says this? John only recognized Jesus as the Messiah when the Spirit descended and remained with him. Of course, John was not the only one who did know recognize Jesus as the Lord. The people of his home town not only had not recognized who he was, but rejected him after he began his public ministry. Recognizing who and what Jesus was came when God revealed it through the descent of the Spirit. There are many instances when we despair about what is happening in our world. I wonder how often God is at work but what is being done is hidden in plain sight because we are oblivious to it. How often do we fail to notice what God is doing? How often do we fail to see God at work in the events of our lives? John had answered the call to go into the wilderness and baptize, making straight the way of the Lord before God ever revealed to him the identity of the Lord. John trusted in the call he received and acted upon it without the certain knowledge of who it would be or exactly when the Messiah would

arrive. In a time when measurable results are so highly valued, when we collect so much data to analyze before we accept anything, are we willing to go and act with more trust than knowledge as we discern the will of God for our lives and our world? In our passage, John the Baptist is the first to notice that the one who approaches is the one about whom the Spirit spoke. John the Baptist notices the activity of God in the one who approaches. It doesn't take long for the next step to happen. The next day after this testimony of recognition and identity, John is standing with two of his own disciples when Jesus again approaches. Again John gives testimony: "and as he watched Jesus walk by, he himself exclaimed, 'Look, here is the Lamb of God!'" John shares his revelation with two of his disciples, two who have answered his call for repentance and have come seeking the way of the Lord. When they hear what John says, they leave John to follow Jesus. When told this way, it seems so natural. Hearing John's declaration about who Jesus is, they turn and follow him. Their leader has declared Jesus to be the one they are waiting on, so they follow him. When they begin following Jesus, Jesus turns to them and asks a question. Not the question we would ask if someone began following us. That would likely be, "What are you doing?" Or perhaps even why are you following me? No, what Jesus asks of them is: "What are you looking for?" Their response is not because our leader told us you are the Messiah so we want to follow you. In fact, they don't answer that question. Instead, they call him "Rabbi" or teacher and ask a question of their own as to where he is staying. Again, the answer Jesus gives is not the answer to their question. He doesn't supply the name of a hotel, or even the name of a friend's house where he might be staying. What Jesus says is: "Come and see." A simple, yet complex invitation. Jesus issues the invitation for these two to come with him and see what he is about. This passage is full of questions. Questions which are not exactly answered, but which reflect the movement toward fulfillment of the words of the prophet Isaiah: a way is prepared in the wilderness for the Lord. The passage from Isaiah which for this morning is part of the servant songs which describe the purpose God had for forming the nation of Israel: Israel was to be a light to the nations. John the Baptist's role was to point to Jesus who came to be a light in the darkness of this world. When Jesus turned and asked the two who followed him what were they seeking, they did not answer that question but instead just remained with Jesus when given the invitation. But notice, one of these two, named Andrew, had a brother, named Peter, to whom he went to share the revelation that he had received from John. Notice and share and then invite. That is the pattern within this passage. Within the gospel of John we don't actually have the narration of Jesus' baptism. What we have instead is that John is sharing what he has seen at the baptism and the results of that sharing. And that may be the larger message of this story from what is called the Fourth Gospel. The message being that when it comes to our relationship with Jesus, our primary goal is to see and to share. For some reason that seems to have become very difficult for us to do. We call it evangelism and we are often uncomfortable with that word and what it has come to mean. We equate it with an overbearing and aggressive attempt to coerce or threaten with images of a particular interpretation which links salvation to that interpretation. But within this text we have an example of what evangelism is biblically speaking. It is what John the Baptist does here. He sees the dove descend upon Jesus and tells others what he sees. That's it. Andrew later does the same. He tells his brother what he and John's other disciple say—they have found the person they believe is the Messiah—and he invites Peter to come along and see for himself. That is the biblical meaning of being an

evangelist: to share the good news that the Messiah has come. We are called as disciples by God for a purpose; to share the good news we have received that through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ God has entered the world. In order to do that we must begin noticing what God is doing in our lives. Jesus invited the two who followed him to come and see; to begin following before they had seen any demonstration of power. We are also called to share what we know and experience in our relationship with Christ. This sharing is just that: to see and share. Not to threaten, not to coerce, not to intimidate, not to woo or wheedle or to plead, but simply to witness to what we know because we have sought to see where and how God is acting in and around us. We all have images of that type of evangelism from TV and perhaps from personal encounters. But in that type of activity there is no joy—and being the bearer of good news should be joyful. When Jesus invited those who followed him to come and see, he was issuing an invitation to a relationship. When we notice God's activity in and around us, when we share that revelation with others, we also issue an invitation for them to come and see and experience a relationship, a community which is full of good news because God is and always will be active in this world and issuing invitations to relationship through Jesus the Christ. Thanks be to God.