

**John 1:29-42**

<sup>29</sup>The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! <sup>30</sup>This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.’ <sup>31</sup>I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel.” <sup>32</sup>And John testified, “I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. <sup>33</sup>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.’ <sup>34</sup>And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God.” <sup>35</sup>The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, <sup>36</sup>and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, “Look, here is the Lamb of God!” <sup>37</sup>The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. <sup>38</sup>When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, “What are you looking for?” They said to him, “Rabbi” (which translated means Teacher), “where are you staying?” <sup>39</sup>He said to them, “Come and see.” They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o’clock in the afternoon. <sup>40</sup>One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. <sup>41</sup>He first found his brother Simon and said to him, “We have found the Messiah” (which is translated Anointed). <sup>42</sup>He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, “You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas” (which is translated Peter).

Come, Holy Spirit, Heavenly Dove:

Open our ears to the truth of your word, that the testimony of Christ may be strengthened among us and the glad news of deliverance be revealed in our time. Amen.

What comes to mind when you hear the word, *evangelism*? Jehovah Witnesses knocking on your door? Bible toting Christians who ask pointed questions like, “Are you saved?” Perhaps you’ve been the recipient of what felt like Christian indoctrination, pushed upon you with proofs in chapter and verse. Some groups actually have quotas on the work of evangelism and specify how many contacts believers must make each week.

Perhaps you’ve been to a “revival” and experienced the evangelist preacher pressing the gospel message with great passion and energy. What did that feel like? Were you inspired to go down front for the altar call? Or like a friend of mine, did you want to get out of there as fast as you could?

Have you ever felt uncomfortable with an evangelist who was pushing too hard? If it has ever felt like evangelism-by-coercion, it is not biblical. By my read of the Gospels, Jesus never tried to coerce

anyone into believing in him. As I read the Gospels, Jesus attracted a following because the love he demonstrated was irresistible

The Gospel writers are often called evangelists, and if we carefully read their accounts we will begin to see an evangelism that is not concerned with quotas, but with loving and caring for sisters and brothers. Evangelism in the Gospels is about allowing the love of God to work through us on behalf of others. That’s evangelism as Jesus taught.

The Gospel writers told the story of the man, Jesus, of Nazareth. They pointed to Jesus and wrote about how the love of God came into the world through him, with power to heal and make whole. The gospel evangelists wanted the world to know that God lived and moved in this man, Jesus, *and...* that God lives and moves in us as well!

In our gospel lesson for today, the evangelist we call John, tells the story of John the Baptist encountering Jesus. The Baptist had such intimacy with God that he had been given a vision of what to expect as a sign of the coming Messiah. And John saw the sign – the Spirit descending as a dove and remaining on Jesus. The Baptist then shared what he had seen, and proclaimed to his own disciples that this Jesus was the Lamb of God, the very Son of God.

When John saw Jesus coming he said to two of his disciples, “Look, here is the Lamb of God.” When the two saw Jesus, they followed him. As they did, Jesus looked back at them and asked, “What are you looking for?” Then John’s disciples answered, “Rabbi, where are you staying?” Jesus could have given them a physical address as an answer, but instead his response was far more open-ended and invitational; he said, “Come and see.”

Let me suggest that Jesus’ style of evangelism here is disarmingly irresistible. So the two went to see, and as the hour was already late in the day (4:00 p.m.), they ended up staying with Jesus for the night. The next day, one of the two, Andrew (Simon Peter’s brother), went to fetch his brother and brought him to Jesus, for he had told him they had found the Messiah. Can’t you just hear Andrew excitedly saying to his brother, ‘We’ve found him, come and see! Come and see!’

This pattern is repeated later on in John's gospel; Jesus called Philip to follow, and Philip came on board. Then Philip found Nathaniel and shared his excitement about Jesus, saying to Nathaniel, "Come and see."

Again later in John's gospel, Jesus encountered a Samaritan woman at a well. They talked; the expectation of messiah came up in their conversation. Jesus said, "I am he." In her excitement she returned to her village to tell everyone what she'd found. "Come and see," she said, and many from her village came out to see Jesus.

The model of evangelism in John's gospel is very simple and natural; those who encounter Jesus are moved by the experience, and it seems that they cannot help but invite others to experience it too, as if they were saying, *'This is totally awesome. But don't take my word for it, come and see!'* The work of evangelism is not about trying to convince anybody about anything. The work of evangelism is about sharing our experience of the love of God and saying, 'Hey, check this out! Come and see.'

Where have we experienced God's love? Where have we seen God active? Where have we seen God present? Where have we been fed by the Spirit? Where have we been touched, or inspired, or blown away by God? Evangelism is simply sharing that experience and inviting others to it, so *they* can experience it for themselves.

Again; where have we found hope? When have we felt held in God's arms, or sheltered under God's wings? How have we been fed by God? Evangelism is very basic; it is simply, *one starving pilgrim telling another starving pilgrim where to find bread.*

In this 21<sup>st</sup> century what percentage of the American population do you suppose attends church? According to the Hartford Institute of Religion Research, more than 40% of Americans "say" they go to church weekly. As it turns out, however, less than 20% are actually found in church. In other words approximately 80% of Americans do not worship regularly in a church setting.

So what is going on? If Jesus is so *irresistible*, why is church so easy to resist? Could it be that it is the best kept secret of our time? Clearly I'm preaching to the choir here, for you all know how important church is to you, and you know how important church and

your faith has been in your life. You would not want to think about where you might be today if it weren't for your faith and your church.

Evangelism is the simple process of sharing where we've found nurturance for our souls, minds and bodies. Of those 80% who don't go to church, some of them may be searching for deeper meaning in their lives. Some of them may be longing for an experience of a loving community and the deeper experience of communion with other faithful. Some of them may be afraid they will not be welcome. Some of them have heard bad things about the church. Some of them have actually been hurt by the church.

Jesus calls us to let the love of God live in us, and live through us for the healing of the world. Evangelism is about sharing the love. So...opening ourselves to this *evangelism thing* requires that we reflect on our own experiences of God's grace and love in our lives. When I think about how the church loved me into being, I am both amazed and eternally grateful.

My home church did some heavy lifting on my behalf. They truly loved me and believed in me in spite of my rough edges. In fact, in every church I've been part of, I have been loved, and nurtured, and of course, forgiven for my weaknesses and blunders. I am the pastor I am today because of their – and your – nurturing and care. Through you here at First Church, and all the faithful sisters and brothers of the churches I've served, God has been alive and working through you; what grace, yes, what grace!

St. Francis of Assisi bid us to *Preach the Gospel at all times; if necessary use words.* So, can we *demonstrate* the love of God in our lives? This is evangelism at its core; sharing the love of God with all whom we meet. It is an irresistible "message," and then, what more do we need to say except, ***"Come and see."***

Lord Jesus, make us instruments of your love and peace for the healing of the world. Amen.

