



October 14, 2012
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*Did You Get the Word?
One Thing Leads to Another*
John 1: 35-50

I spent most of this week at a pastors' retreat and presbytery meeting in California with Pastor John and the Hackmans. It was such a blessing to be with friends, to worship and pray together and to hear Jeremy introduced by his new church. He did great! You would have been proud. We also examined a ton of new pastors to be received into the presbytery and two of those were our own Larry and Megan. I am very pleased and proud to be able to tell you this morning... that your two newbies **hit it out of the park!** Each of them preached and then answered any questions that came their way. One man who is known for being intimidating and not very thrilled with women pastors, stood up and said, "Megan: yours was the best devotional I've ever heard at presbytery!" And he volunteered to serve in her ordination commission! When the vote was taken, it was unanimous! And when the Hackmans are ordained on November 18, they will have the distinction of being the very first clergy couple in the EPC! I cannot tell you how many other pastors came up to me and asked, "How did you snag those two?" So, Chapel Hill, I want you to congratulate your brand new, almost reverends, Larry and Megan Hackman who, by the way, are celebrating their sixth anniversary today!

I want to start my message this morning by asking you to use your imagination. Close your eyes. Imagine that you are standing on the banks of the Jordan River: it's early in the day, but it is already hot. You are back at the spot you've staked out for several days now, because you cannot get enough of this guy... this preacher. You walked miles from to get here... the middle of nowhere. But you aren't coming because it's convenient; you are coming because you have never heard anything like this. This guy preaches like a prophet. Boy can he preach.

But boy, is he weird. Dressed in camel skin and sporting dreadlocks, his beard is sticky with honey and sprinkled with grasshopper legs because the pointy parts get stuck when he eats them. And his sermons aren't exactly seeker-sensitive. Basically he has one message: Repent—turn from your sinful ways—and go the other way. Everyone is here... common folk, rich folk, Pharisees, Sadducees... Roman soldiers. And every day, after his sermon, people waded into the Jordan to be dunked as a sign of spiritual cleansing.

This is the most exciting thing that has happened here in years. He is the talk of the town. There is something powerful and authentic about this man; people can't get enough of him. You can't get enough of him.

Now imagine, you are standing there—your favorite place on the bank—John is in his customary spot, preaching away, when suddenly, he stops. He points and cries out at the top of his lungs, "Oh my! Look! Look, everyone! There He is. There's the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. That's the One I've been telling you about. That's the one we've been waiting for!"

"Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." That one sentence sets off a string of events that change the world. One thing led to another... a chain reaction... and nothing would ever be the same again. We are about to hear the very first words spoken by Jesus and to meet His earliest disciples. We are going to journey through this passage, verse by verse. So keep your Bibles open. Ready? Let's start with prayer. *[Prayer]*

³⁵The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. ³⁶When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God!"

When did this encore happen? The next day. Notice, John was there "again" as he always was. And he was there with two of his closest friends. This may not grab your attention, but it grabs mine. I just spent a week with preachers. These words describe our lives, actually. Sunday after Sunday, we step into the pulpit... again... and again. We wonder which of our friends will be here. And we pray that when we are, Jesus will "pass by..." He will show up, and we will be able to say, "Ah... look, see! There He is! There He is again! The Lamb of God! Again! How cool is that?" It's why we think Church is important. Something powerful happens when God's preacher meets with his friends and, together, they wait to catch a glimpse of Jesus. It doesn't happen at home reading the paper. It doesn't happen at CenturyLink Stadium or on the soccer field. It happens here in church... God's people, every week, together, with their preacher, waiting for Jesus to show up, again... and again, and again.

³⁷When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus.

This is another passage that hits preachers hard. John brings two of his closest disciples and waits, hoping that Jesus will show up again, and he does! And John points him out! "Look... there he is!" And what do John's disciples do? They stop being John's disciples, and they become Jesus' disciples. "They followed Jesus." When I hear that a member of this church leaves us and starts attending another church, it normally hurts my feelings. (Normally, but not always! Sometimes I consider it a blessed subtraction!) We preachers tend to want to hold on to our sheep, but John points to Jesus, says, "Look, the Lamb of God!" Then he does this. *[Gesture to follow Him]* It is what every preacher should be doing, but it doesn't always come easily for us. It doesn't always come easily for me. I like the

crowds. I want you to stay here with me. But John's says, "Don't follow me; follow Him! Follow the one I'm pointing to" wherever He leads.

³⁸Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, "What do you want?"

Apparently, Jesus was walking away and the two former disciples of John just start walking behind him. Have you ever noticed someone stalking you? It makes more sense of Jesus' question, doesn't it? And now we hear His very first words. This Logos—this eternal, divine, creator God who put on flesh and pitched his tent in our backyard—His very first recorded words to his new followers: "What do you want?" How would you answer Jesus if he asked you that question? "I want peace. I want my back healed. I want the lawsuit to be over. I want a job. I want to stop feeling so ashamed. I want to stop feeling so inadequate... so depressed." If Jesus asked you that question, what would your answer be? How did these two respond?

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

I always thought this was a goofy, bumbling answer. I remember one time when Cyndi and I were stopped in Seattle by an on-the-street reporter who asked some question about Vice President Quayle. I was so surprised that I completely butchered my response. I was almost incoherent. Humiliating. That night, my wife made the evening news, and I—the preacher, the man who talks for a living—ended up on the cutting room floor. Maybe these guys couldn't think of anything clever to say and just blurted out, "Duhhh... what's your address?" Or maybe they were saying, "We trust John. He trusts you. We want to get to know you. To hang out with you. Where do you live?" What was Jesus' reply?

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.

"Come and see." What gracious words from Jesus! Remember them; they will show up again.

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

This is the first of three times that Andrew is mentioned by name. And every time we meet Andrew, he is introducing someone to Jesus: his brother Simon; the little boy with the sack lunch in chapter 6; some out-of-town visitors in chapter 12. Andrew never became one of the inner three disciples. Not the preacher that Peter became, nor the theologian that John became, nor the leader that James became. But he could do one thing; he brought friends to Jesus.

In the earliest years of my ministry, Peachy Smalling was the greatest evangelist in our church. Every time she sold someone a house, she sold them on Chapel Hill, too. It was a sad day for me when Peachy retired. She is an Andrew! We could use more.

Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas" (which, when translated, is Peter).

Do you remember who Simon was? He was a fisherman from Galilee. Galileans were the hillbillies of the Jewish nation. They had dorky accents and were considered uncouth and uneducated! And this particular Galilean was a fisherman... an ordinary, run-of-the-mill fisherman... nothing special, nothing impressive. Certainly nothing that would suggest he would become the leader of the Christian movement.

But Jesus, in that moment, looked into him and saw something special... something strong and powerful that no one else had ever seen before. And then Jesus does something strange. What is the first thing he says? "I'm giving you a new name." Isn't that a little odd? Can you imagine me walking up to you for the very first time and saying, "I'm giving you a new name; you are now Rocky." What? But that's what Jesus does.

I wonder if Simon's friends snickered in the background. If you knew this guy, you knew he was anything but rock-like. He was more like one of his own fish, flip flopping around on the shore. His name was Flipflop. But Jesus saw something more. He "looked" into Simon and saw what no one else could see in him—potential no one else recognized—and he called it forth. "I name you Rocky, because you are going to be a rock for me." Later, "Rocky" became "Flipflop" again when he betrayed Jesus, but Jesus redeemed that failure. And ultimately, this simple Galilean fisherman whom Jesus saw and renamed, became the leader of the greatest movement to ever sweep the world.

One of the most compelling reasons to point your friends to Jesus is this: if they will take that first step, He will take it from there. He will see and call forth from them a person that no one else has ever seen before.

⁴³The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, "Follow me."

⁴⁴Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. ⁴⁵Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." ⁴⁶"Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" Nathanael asked. "Come and see," said Philip.

"The next day" Jesus heads north to Galilee... a 90 mile walk! He finds a guy named Philip and says, "Follow me!" Short and sweet, right? It's interesting how

Jesus meets each person where they are. To Andrew and John he said, "Come and see where I live. Let's get to know each other." To Simon he says, "I see who you really are; I'm giving you a name to live up to." To Philip he just says, "Follow me." That's all it took. Some people are that ready for Jesus.

Now Philip does the finding. He finds a straight-shooting cynic by the name of Nathanael. He tells him that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah. Did you hear Nathanael's rude response? "Nazareth? Can anything good come from Nazareth?" If Galilee was Hicksville, Nazareth was Podunk in Hicksville. It was such nothing of a town, it wasn't even mentioned in the Old Testament. How could anything good come out of that flyspeck Nazareth?

How does Philip respond? "Come and see." Sound familiar? Exactly the words Jesus spoke to his first followers. Sometimes, when we are trying to be pointers to Jesus, we feel like we have to defend Him; like we must have all the answers; that we must cross swords with smart cynics like Nathanael. Would it make you a more willing Jesus-pointer if all you had to say was, "Come and see! Just give Jesus a try. Check him out." Jesus can defend himself! When people are at least willing to take a look at Jesus; who He is, what He is doing, who His people are... that alone can change the hardest of hearts... like Nathanael's.

⁴⁷When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, He said of him, "Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false." ⁴⁸"How do you know me?" Nathanael asked. Jesus answered, "I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you." ⁴⁹Then Nathanael declared, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel." ⁵⁰Jesus said, "You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You shall see greater things than that."

When Andrew brought Simon to Jesus, Jesus looked inside of him and said, "I see something special in you, something stronger than others see. I'm going to name you Rocky." When Jesus looks at Nathanael—this guy that everyone else sees as a cynic—once again, Jesus sees something more. And again, He calls it out with one of the greatest compliments He ever pays anyone: "Here is a true Israelite; there's nothing phony about him." To everyone else, Nathanael is Mr. Hard-nose, but Jesus renames him, "Straight shooter." He shares with Nathanael a supernatural vision of him sitting under a fig tree. That's all it takes. Nathanael goes from dissing Jesus because He grew up on the wrong side of the tracks to declaring him the "Son of God" and "King of Israel!" Wow! That was a change of heart. The hard-nose that everyone would have believed least likely to "get religion" sees Jesus, and again is seen by Jesus as no one else has ever seen him before.

One thing leads to another—one simple introduction, one simple question, the willingness to just point to Jesus and let Him do His work. It has a cumulative effect. When, like Andrew, we have the courage to just share with our family

member what we have learned about Jesus... when, like Philip, we dare to invite our cynical friend to church... when we are willing to point and then do this [*Beckon Come with me*] amazing things happen. There are people who will come to church, kids who will come with your kid to Sunday school, if you invite them. They won't come at my invitation; they don't know me. But they know you, and if you bring them, I promise, together we will introduce them to Jesus.

There was a time we did this really well as a church. It's how we grew so fast in our early years. People telling family members, "You must come and visit." Friends telling friends, "God is doing something great; come and see." We exploded. Without web sites or advertising or radio spots... we exploded because we had a church full of passionate Andrews and Philips. Honestly, I don't sense that same invitational passion in our church today. Jesus is still here, doing amazing things. Last Sunday's worship is proof of that! And Jesus is at work among us the 100 faithful souls who will not quit until Linda Brewer is back in her home with her husband. There's plenty of Jesus to be seen around here, but I don't sense that we have as much of this [*Beckon*] as we used to. Do we? When was the last time you said to a family member or friend, "Why don't you just come along and see?"

Maybe it's because we got so big that we stopped believing there was room for one more. Well there is. Maybe it's because we got so used to the great things God was doing in our midst... it stopped being remarkable to us. Well, it still is. Maybe it's because we got what we want and we like it the way it is, and we don't want it to change. I hope not. Because, beloved, there are thousands of people around us who are not happy with how they are living, don't know who they were created to be and long for a new name, a new identity... like Rocky, or Significant, or Loved, or Hopeful, or Purity, or Fidelity, or Sober.

For 25 years I have had the same longing: I long for a church full of Christian disciples who care enough about their unsaved family and unsaved friends and unsaved neighbors to do something about it! To say to them, "Jesus is amazing. Why don't you just come and see for yourself?" We need more Andrews and Philips. How about you? Will you ask Jesus to give you that new name? Will you take a moment now and ask him to bring someone's face to your mind? Someone you could point toward Jesus? You could beckon to join you? "Come and see!" ...three simple words that could change their life. Will you do it?

Sermon Questions

- **REFLECT & APPLY TOGETHER:** Share your thoughts. Don't teach! Listen and reflect on God's word together; grapple with what God is calling us to do and be through this passage.

- **PRAY TOGETHER:** Tell the Lord one thing you are thankful for, and lay one concern before the Lord.

- **DIG DEEPER**

1. For a second time, John says, "Look! The Lamb of God!" This involves both excitement and pointing. How excited are you about Jesus, honestly? And when was the last time you pointed others to him in some way? Describe that experience and, if not, why not?

2. There are three different kinds of "good news sharing" in our story today. Can you identify them? Which seems most comfortable to you? Least comfortable? Why?