

Pastor Jon's Sermon from Sunday, January 15, 2023. Habibi family visit. I used John 1:29-42.

On this Martin Luther King Jr. Weekend, we welcome the Omari Habibi family to Our Savior's Lutheran Church. Since the day I met them in our gathering area and we shared some food after they attended worship at the Muslim Temple in Neenah, we discovered a mutual curiosity about each other's faith. They were asking me about Jesus. And I asked them about Allah. It was a beautiful conversation even in the midst of language differences. Today, they get to meet all of you and catch a glimpse of our worship.

When it comes to your faith, or coming to church, or your search for meaning and purpose in life, what are you looking for? Have you thought about that lately?

When I come to church, I want to hear a message of hope, God's grace for me and others, and a critique on the ways of the world that aren't life giving. I want to walk away with a reorientation as to what is important and how it connects to my faith in Jesus Christ. To have a word to help me navigate the storms and difficulties of the week at work or in our families.

This is the question Jesus asked John the Baptist's disciples when they started following Jesus. What are you looking for? They respond with a question, "Where are you staying?" Which really is a way of saying, can we join you? Jesus then responds, "Come and see."

I asked this to our Wednesday lectionary Bible study group "What are you looking for?" in your faith or church and they answered this way:

A pathway to peace

Prayers answered

Acceptance of who I am in a community of faith

Meaningful relationships

Fellowship

People you can trust

Forgiveness and acceptance

Love within fellowship

Security in my family

Stability

Community that looks beyond itself

Salvation

So, this week in this second Sunday in epiphany, what do we learn about Jesus' identity and mission? And how does it connect to us?

First, Jesus picks up a few more names in our Gospel: Lamb of God, Son of God, Rabbi and Messiah. John calls Jesus the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, and Son of God. "Lamb of God" would refer back to the Passover in Exodus 12 when the Hebrew people living in slavery in Egypt are instructed to slaughter a lamb, put some of its blood on their doorposts, and eat the lamb. Those who do this will be spared the final plague of the death of the first born that God brings down on the Egyptian people.

Son of God refers to Jesus' closeness to God the Father as revealed in Jesus' baptism, this is my Son, the beloved, with whom I am well pleased. And we know from John 1 that Jesus is God's Son who also happens to be God in human flesh.

So for us, being connected to Jesus through our faith and baptism provide some sort of atonement for our sins and a way to live life under the gift of God's grace through Jesus' work on the cross and resurrection.

Second, we notice that Jesus starts to partner with humans for his mission on earth. Notice how John's disciples leave John and start following Jesus calling him Rabbi, which means teacher, and Messiah, which means anointed one or savior.

In our Gospel, we have a passing of the torch from John to Jesus. I take a lot from John's pointing beyond himself to Jesus... and his willingness to let go of his disciples. By nature we are selfish. But John knew his role and mission was to prepare the way for Jesus the

Messiah to enter into the world. He would baptize with water, but Jesus with the Holy Spirit. It is hard to let your students go.

John saw Jesus coming toward him, pointed at him and said to his disciples, "Here is the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." This happened on two consecutive days. After the second time, his disciples left John and started following Jesus.

I feel like we are all John the Baptists... called to point beyond ourselves in word and deed to Jesus in the midst of our everyday lives. It reminds me of being in the park with a child who is always pointing and asking the question "What's that?" And as a parent or guardian, we respond, that's a bird. Or that's the wind or a squirrel. I think our job as followers of Jesus is to come and see and to invite others to come and see the love of Jesus when we recognize it.