

BGO Sermon for 1-22-17 –The Journey of the Shepherd: from Lamb to Shepherd

Turning points. I posted the question on Facebook this week: *what have been some of the turning points in your life?* A lot of the responses were ones you might consider pretty common: graduation, new job, meeting the person you'll spend the rest of your life with, news from the doctor - good or bad, losing a loved one. Though we might think of them as normal or typical, they certainly don't feel that way when we're in the midst of them. Those turning points move us from one path in life to another, often in a completely different direction.

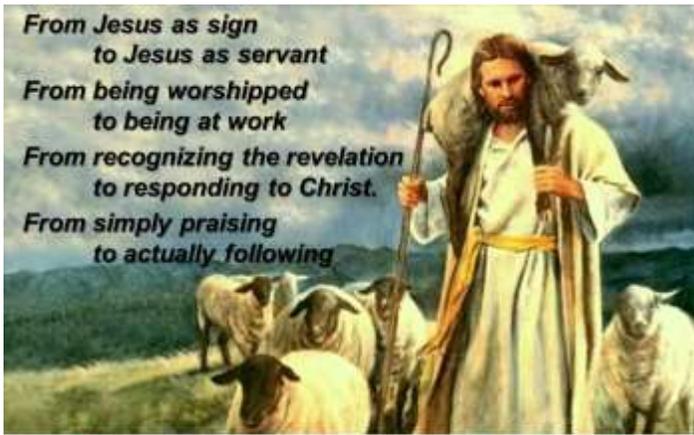


One of the first turning points in Jesus' earthly life was the one we celebrated last week: Jesus' baptism in the Jordan River. In a way, it was like Jesus' graduation, the start of His earthly ministry. And it really does mark a shift, not just for Jesus' story but for ours as well: there is a shift in the focus of our Scripture reading, and in our church calendar, as we move further into the season

after Epiphany.

We see that shift in today's passage from John's Gospel. It begins with John the Baptizer's proclamation, "***Behold: the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!***" The very next day, Jesus begins to gather disciples, as two of John's followers are told "***Come and see.***" The shift is there in the other Gospel accounts as well, moving swiftly from Jesus' baptism to the calling of Peter, Andrew, James and John by the Sea of Galilee. With that shift, our understanding of Christ is broadened - adding to our image of Jesus the Lamb of God, the image of Jesus the Good Shepherd – the Shepherd who tells us, "***I have come in order that you might have life—life in all its fullness.***"





From Jesus as sign
to Jesus as servant
From being worshipped
to being at work
From recognizing the revelation
to responding to Christ.
From simply praising
to actually following

***“I have come in order that you might have life—
life in all its fullness.”***

Our understanding moves from Jesus as a sign to Jesus as a servant. It wasn't that long ago we heard the angel proclaim to the shepherds: ***“this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.”***

Jesus came as a sign of God's great love for us, God's desire that we would spend eternity in heaven with Him. But once Jesus moves out of the water, God's love puts on hands and feet, moving out to

heal the hurting and feed the hungry. As Jesus said about His mission, ***“the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve.”***

With that, the focus of Jesus' life moves from being worshipped - like when the Wise Men worshipped Him- to Jesus being at work, doing the works of His Father. Of course we recognize that Jesus received worship during His ministry, like the disciples worshipping after Jesus calmed the storm. But with every miracle Jesus pointed to what God was doing, that God should receive the glory. It's as Jesus said to His disciples when He healed a blind man, ***We need to be energetically at work for the One who sent me here, working while the sun shines.***

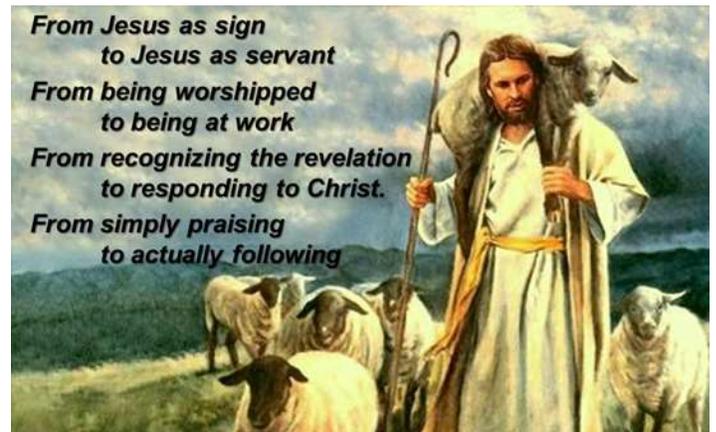
As turning points often do, the move to ministry after Jesus' baptism brought a different kind of relationship with those around Him. It moved them from just recognizing the revelation of God in the Baby Jesus, to responding to Jesus as Christ. As Christ began his ministry, others began to view him as a leader and teacher, like seeing someone as more of an adult after graduation.

And in that ministry Jesus called those who came to move from simply praising - extolling his teaching or marveling at his miracles - to actually following Him, doing the works He was doing. Think of what Jesus did in his earthly life. We read of Him praying by Himself, or praying with and for others. He was often in the synagogue, reading the Scriptures. He would remind others of God's word, recalling Scripture often in His teaching and in His rebukes. As an observant Jew he fasted, and expected others to do that as well. But he also shared meals with others, people outside of his disciples, people who didn't always see eye-to-eye with Him.

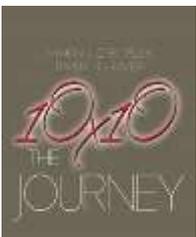


And in all of that, he brought his disciples along, leading them to new places, to new pastures, to others who weren't in their sheepfold. Some would follow: not just the 12 disciples we often think of, but many others would join with him, men and women, the lowly and the highborn. We know of others who didn't follow – like the rich young ruler, who couldn't give up trusting in his wealth or his position.

Look at those things on the list there: being a sign of God's love, serving others, worshipping, working, recognizing God's action, responding to Christ, praising God and yes, actually following - all of those are things we should be doing. One of the main tenets of our United Methodist tradition is that the Grace of God shown to us, the revelation of His amazing love – it calls for a response from us. We are not called just to be, but to live, to have life in all its fullness.



***“I have come in order that you might have life—
life in all its fullness.”***



With the start of a new year, we're calling the churches to join in a journey that, as each of us participates, will help us to live more abundantly. This year-long journey, called "*The Journey 10x10*," will have a different focus for each month, calling us to the works that Jesus did. It only seems right to start with prayer, so February will

challenge us to pray just 10 more minutes a day, and I'm sure we'll be amazed at how that transforms our lives. March will focus us on God's Word, while April helps us look at Christian Conversation. There will be sharing meals and sharing our faith stories, inviting people to church, serving in mission work, even fasting. We'll look at our giving, and reach out to others in acts of kindness.

1. Pray 10 Minutes Every Day	February
2. Read 10 Books or 10 Minutes Every Day	March
3. Connect 10 Times in Conversation	April
4. Share 10 Meals	May
5. Tell Your Faith Story 10 Times	June
6. Invite 10 People	July
7. Engage in 10 Forms of Mission/Outreach	August
8. Fast 10 Times	September
9. Increase Giving 10%	October
10. Perform 10 Random Acts of Kindness	November

And throughout the year, we'll be challenged to put all of those things into practice, doing the things that Jesus did, those works He calls His disciples to, even to this very day. In all of it, the call to us is to move from just being, to actually living. We are called to grow like Christ did, to move forward in our faith. We need to become doers of the word, not just hearers. It is time for us to act, living the faith lessons we have learned, like study and prayer. And we too are called to be God's hands and feet, showing God's love to the world.



Don't misunderstand; Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever. Our salvation comes from the lamb who takes away our sin, by faith and faith alone. That calls for us to see the sign that God gave to us, to receive the Revelation, and most importantly, to accept the sacrifice that was made for us by Christ coming to earth to take away our sin. By no other name than Jesus can we be

saved. He is always the lamb, the sacrifice, the one who gave Himself so we might have life, the one prefigured in Scripture when Abraham said “***God will provide the lamb.***”

By the same token, Jesus is and has always been the Shepherd, the King, the Head of the Church, the One who will lead us into a better life than we could ever imagine. Having the more and better life beyond our wildest dreams calls for us to follow – to do the works that Christ did. We are called not just to view Jesus as lamb and shepherd, but to follow where Christ leads and follow his example as we grow into our faith. Doing those works that Christ taught us will not only move us closer to Him, open us more to the Holy Spirit and give us a deeper sense of God's heart, mind and will; those works will ultimately move both our churches and God's Kingdom forward.

The Apostle Paul challenged the church in Ephesus: ***take in the extravagant dimensions of Christ's love. Reach out and experience the breadth! Test its length! Plumb the depths! Rise to the heights! Live full lives, full in the fullness of God!*** That is the challenge for us: to take in all that God has for us, to give ourselves to the gifts God gives us. Let's make this whole year a turning point for us, turning us more toward the fullness of God in our lives. Let's join in the journey the Shepherd will lead us on this year, that we and our churches might have life - life in all its fullness.

JOHN 1:29-39a (NIV)

²⁹ The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! ³⁰ This is the one I meant when I said, ‘A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.’ ³¹ I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel.”

³² Then John gave this testimony: “I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. ³³ And I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, ‘The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.’

³⁴ I have seen and I testify that this is God’s Chosen One.”

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

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

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

³⁹ “Come,” he replied, “and you will see.”

JOHN 10:10 (GNB)

¹⁰ The thief comes only in order to steal, kill, and destroy. I have come in order that you might have life — life in all its fullness.

LUKE 2:10-12 (NKJV)

¹⁰ Then the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. ¹¹ For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

¹² And this *will be* the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.”

MARK 10:42-45 (NIV)

⁴² Jesus called them together and said, “You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. ⁴³ Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. ⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

JOHN 9:3-4a (Message)

³⁻⁵ Jesus said, “You’re asking the wrong question. You’re looking for someone to blame. There is no such cause-effect here. Look instead for what God can do. We need to be energetically at work for the One who sent me here, working while the sun shines.

GENESIS 22:7-14 (CEV)

⁷⁻⁸ Isaac said, “Father, we have the coals and the wood, but where is the lamb for the sacrifice?”

“My son,” Abraham answered, “God will provide the lamb.”

The two of them walked on, and ⁹ when they reached the place that God had told him about, Abraham built an altar and placed the wood on it. Next, he tied up his son and put him on the wood. ¹⁰ He then took the knife and got ready to kill his son.

¹¹ But the Lord’s angel shouted from heaven, “Abraham! Abraham!”

“Here I am!” he answered.

¹² “Don’t hurt the boy or harm him in any way!” the angel said. “Now I know that you truly obey God, because you were willing to offer him your only son.”

¹³ Abraham looked up and saw a ram caught by its horns in the bushes. So he took the ram and sacrificed it in place of his son.

¹⁴ Abraham named that place “The Lord Will Provide.” And even now people say, “On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided.”

EPHESIANS 3:14-19 (Message)

¹⁴⁻¹⁹ My response is to get down on my knees before the Father, this magnificent Father who parcels out all heaven and earth. I ask him to strengthen you by his Spirit—not a brute strength but a glorious inner strength—that Christ will live in you as you open the door and invite him in. And I ask him that with both feet planted firmly on love, you'll be able to take in with all followers of Jesus the extravagant dimensions of Christ's love. Reach out and experience the breadth! Test its length! Plumb the depths! Rise to the heights! Live full lives, full in the fullness of God!