

## Sermon Summary for December 16, 2010

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### John 1:29-42

<sup>29</sup>The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, 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 before me, because he was before me.' <sup>31</sup>I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel." <sup>32</sup>And John bore witness: "I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. <sup>33</sup>I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' <sup>34</sup>And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God."

<sup>35</sup>The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples, <sup>36</sup>and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" <sup>37</sup>The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. <sup>38</sup>Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, "What are you seeking?" And they said to him, "Rabbi" (which means Teacher), "where are you staying?" <sup>39</sup>He said to them, "Come and you will see." So they came and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour. <sup>40</sup> One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. <sup>41</sup>He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which means Christ). <sup>42</sup>He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "So you are Simon the son of John? You shall be called Cephas" (which means Peter).

## What Business Are You In?

One day a man called a church by mistake. The secretary was distracted and answered simply "Hello." "I'd like one pound of pastrami, two pints of cole slaw, and one pint of potato salad" he said. "Wait a minute, sir; we aren't a food service establishment..." Before the secretary could continue the man interrupted. "Well what business are you in?" That took her aback. She had to think about her answer.

What's our business on the corner of Westcott and Chandler? To improve morality? To offer spiritual first aid? To promote fellowship? To help the needy? These are only by-products of our real business.

**We are here to connect people to the Lamb of God.**

We do this in three ways:

**(1) By proclaiming the cross.**

### 1. The cross proclaims that there is something terribly wrong with the world: sin

Sin is what has broken the harmony between God and our world. We see the results of sin in the newspapers. We feel the results of sin in our bodies, feelings, families, and relationships. We proclaim the cross to people because they are suffering on account of sin. The message is: God cares, there is hope for you. That's actually the "fun" part (if I can use that word!).

Here's the hard part: We proclaim the cross to people because they need the forgiveness of sin individually. When we say that there is something terribly wrong with the world, we also have to say, "There is something terribly wrong with you." Talk about politically incorrect! This is a "tough sell" in today's self-esteem-centered market. But it is part of the message of the Cross.

We can give people a lot of good advice about life. But we can only give them one answer to their deepest need, which is the forgiveness of sin. Now this is not a "felt need" for most people. And churches who are mostly concerned with attracting crowds will downplay this truth. They will talk mostly about the general truth, what is wrong with the world. But the individual truth is not as popular. In fact, it can drive "seekers" away!

The reason the Lamb of God came was clearly proclaimed by John the Baptist. He came to "take away the sins of the world." Without that reality, there is no real hope. There is only empty optimism and futile self-effort. People need to acknowledge their sinfulness before a Holy God. That is their only way to hope in life and in death.

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### 2. The cross proclaims that there is forgiveness of sins.

The proclamation of our sinfulness and our need for repentance is summed up under the word “Law.” The law acts two ways. It acts as a mirror, in which we see ourselves as broken, lonely, and in need of God. It also acts as a “hammer.” It shows us how impossible it is to live up to God’s standards. It hammers our pride and self-righteousness to death. We have no hope if the only thing we hear is the Law!

We need to hear the Gospel. “Hearing” is the way faith is created by the Holy Spirit (Romans 10:9).

Let me give you an example. This is not a real person. This is a composite of many people I have met down through the years. She was the victim of a tough childhood which included sexual abuse. She is invited to a church event. What does she need from the church? She needs welcome, support, upholding, and encouragement. These can be given to her in different ways. The pastor or other members of the congregation can take time listen to her, to hear her story. By doing that we give her the gift of dignity and significance. As she honestly tells her story, her pain and anger will surface. Simply telling the truth will help all by itself. But if her Christian community responds to her story with acceptance, empathy, and compassion, a new dimension enters in: the healing power of love. She can slowly begin to give her hurt and anger to the Lord.

As she is gradually enfolded into the fellowship of the Body of Christ, she will become aware of her relationship with God. If she is not yet a believer, we hope she will trust Christ as Savior and Lord. If she is a believer, we hope that the fellowship will act as a “pipeline” for her to experience real love, maybe for the first time in her life. As she continues to grow, we hope she will reach out to others in service and caring. This will add another dimension to her spiritual healing.

(Let me note here that in many cases of sexual abuse professional help is needed. A skilled counselor who has both expertise and clinical experience in helping wounded people like her can be of inestimable value in the healing process.)

So, this dear woman begins to find the love of God and others. She begins to grow in her faith. But she will not be set free until she dares to go beyond feelings, beyond the hurt caused by other people, to her own sin. The hurt she has experienced has undoubtedly been dealt with in sinful ways. Anger, bitterness, rebellion against God, self-pity – these are the ways that sinners respond to pain. And our sinful response only magnifies our pain. She needs to ask God for forgiveness for her own response to other people’s sin. This does not mean that everything was her fault!!! (That is the voice of condemnation from the evil one.) But her own sins are her own fault. She has been justified by the grace of God. Her sin has been covered by the blood of Christ. There is no longer any condemnation before God (Romans 8:1-2). Her problem is not that she is not saved. Her problem is that she is still “under the law” in her conscience.

That’s NOT because we have to make a complete list of every sin in order to be forgiven. God knows how bad our memory is! It’s because there are particular sins that create a “root of bitterness” that still influences us (Hebrews 12:15). And when we allow that influence to go unchecked, the Holy Spirit will convict us of sin. Then our spiritual joy will be dampened. Now, there’s no way for her to control her feelings totally or make them go away. But she needs, like David in Psalm 51, to “own up” to her sin, and to ask for forgiveness and cleansing. (“To forgive” in Greek simply means “to release.”) She needs to take her past sin to the cross, to the Lamb of God.

When that happens, she is ready for the final step. She needs to forgive those who hurt her. Now be careful here! Forgiving someone does not mean that you say it doesn’t matter. It matters! They hurt you. They sinned against you. And they still have to deal with God about that. Nor does forgiveness mean that you cannot seek justice where a crime has been committed. Human justice runs on a different track than personal forgiveness. Criminals owe a debt to society that our forgiveness does not cancel.

Forgiveness means that you take your anger and your need for revenge to the cross of Christ, and let Him take them into Himself. There is no way any secular therapy is going to take you to the Cross. Only the Body of Christ, through the Word of God, can do that.

When we decide to forgive someone it does not mean that our feelings will just go away. Feelings are embedded in our brains, in our memories. But going to the Cross will begin to heal our emotions and our memories. In time they

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will subside. Of course the scars of terrible wounds will still be there until we get to glory. But instead of struggling with rage and hatred, our pain will be transformed and become part of “bearing the cross.”

So you see, connecting people with the Lamb of God runs much deeper than “evangelistic” meetings. It goes all the way down to the bottom of our hearts.

One elderly African pastor told congregation about a vision. One night he saw himself climbing the steep hill to their church. He saw a man carrying a heavy burden. He spoke kindly to the man and asked if he could help. “No,” the man said, “I must do this myself.” Then the pastor noticed that the man’s hands were scarred. This was Jesus! “Lord, are you carrying the world’s sins up the hill?” the pastor asked. “No, not the world’s sin, just yours.”

Every person in the world carries the burden of his or her own sins, whether they feel it or not. They carry it right through death to throne of God. There, without forgiveness, they will meet judgment. Everyone needs to give their sins to Jesus, who by His death on the cross takes them away.

We are here to connect people to the Lamb of God. We do it first of all by proclaiming the cross.

### **(2) By bringing people to Jesus.**

Andrew brought his brother Peter to meet Jesus. Do you remember when we were part of Billy Graham’s last crusade, out in Queens? We were asked to make a list of people to pray for and hopefully to invite to the crusade. Billy called this “Operation Andrew.” He began this program back in the 50’s, and named it after Andrew in our text. We can bring people to Jesus by just inviting them to church, or to events where they’ll meet believers or hear the Gospel.

But once we bring them in, it’s up to the people of God to bear further witness. I received this story from a pastor. I’ll tell it to you from his point of view.

I saw him in the church building for the first time last Thursday. He was in his mid-70’s with thinning silver hair and a neat brown suit. Many times in the past I had invited him to come to church, but he never had. Several other Christian friends had talked to him about the Lord and had tried to share the good news with him. He was a well respected man. I got to know him well. One day I asked him if he had ever been to church. He told me this story. He was a little boy from a poor family. His parents had never recovered from the Great Depression. One day he was invited to church. He came in his only clothes: ragged overalls. He liked the Sunday School class, the songs, the other children. After class the Sunday School teacher said to him: “Son, don’t come to church dressed like you are. We want to look our best when we come into God’s house.” He answered quietly, “No, sir, I won’t.” And he never did, until last Thursday, when I saw him in his coffin.

We are not a country club! We are not here just to talk to our friends. This is God’s house, God’s church. We are here on a mission to connect people with Jesus. Let us notice and welcome our visitors, and if possible enfold them into our fellowship.

### **(3) By bearing the cross.**

There are two well-known pictures, each with the same title, “The Shadow of the Cross.” One by Holeman Hunt depicts the interior of a carpenter’s shop, with Joseph and the Boy Jesus at work. Mary is also present. The Boy Jesus pauses in his work, and as he stretches himself the shadow of the cross is formed on the floor. The other picture is a popular engraving which depicts the Infant Jesus running with outstretched arms to his mother, the shadow of the cross being cast on the ground by his form as he runs. Both pictures are fanciful in form, but their underlying message is true.

The cross is the reason for the coming of Christ. And the cross shadows every follower of Christ. As He bore the cross for us, we will be called upon to suffer for Him. And in that suffering, to bear witness to the Lamb of God. What business are we in? We are in the cross business—to proclaim the cross, to invite people to the cross, and to bear the cross for His glory.