

Narrative Sermon on John 1:29-42. Nijmegen, Jan. 19th 2020.

I really appreciate it that you have turned up, because I need a bit of help. You know, I am trying to write a story about Jesus' life. I know others have done this before me, and brilliantly so, but I have a nagging feeling that not everything has been said yet. (If that is possible at all). We may need yet another perspective, and I am really struggling to put it into words. It's all so beyond me, really. So I would just like to throw some of my thoughts at you. It may help me to focus. I was thinking of starting at the beginning – not very original, I know, and that's what bothers me. I feel like....

Sorry! Where are my manners! Isn't that just like me, starting off without even properly introducing myself. My name is John bar Zebedee. I'm a friend of Andrew, and we both used to be disciples of John the Baptist, when he preached and baptized in Bethany. Those were the days, really. Well, we thought so anyway, not knowing what was still to come. We were having a great time. The times being as they were, what with the Roman occupation and everything, people were really looking for hope. And John was the first one in ages, centuries really, who seemed to speak directly from God. The air was buzzing with excitement. Somebody announcing the kingdom of God! Can it be true? Is salvation at hand? The Messiah coming? We want to be there when it happens! We have to prepare ourselves!

And so they came in masses, day after day. I was one of the first, and was swept away by the whole thing. Got baptized, and stayed afterwards to assist the Baptist in his work. There was no way he could baptize all those people himself. It was so moving to see them go down into the water. I remember a tax collector breaking down completely, and promising to give half of his income to the poor. And a soldier – you know they're not the most likeable people, comes with the job, I guess, but this one helped a little old lady get back onto the river's brink like she was his own mother.

No wonder people started to think John was the Messiah himself. He wasn't very king-like, to be honest, but our tradition was a bit muddled anyway, so what sort of Messiah we were expecting wasn't always clear. Maybe it was just as right that a prophet should lead us, instead of a king. Like in the days of Moses. John denied it himself, though, saying this was only the start of things and we had to wait for somebody else.

Then Jesus came along and everything changed. The Baptist and Jesus knew each other, of course – they were cousins. But the Baptist had a revelation of some sort, because when he noticed Jesus among the crowds he became all excited. Seemed like he suddenly recognized him in a different way. There he is! There he is! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. You all know water won't be enough to cleanse you from your sin. But he has been baptized with the Holy Spirit, and now he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit, cleansing you from the inside out. It's him I have been talking about all along.'

I was flabbergasted. I thought we were expecting a saving king for Israel, and now suddenly it was about a Lamb and about the whole world. I couldn't take it in, but I was fascinated. The Baptist explained it to us later, and when Jesus was there again the next day, he repeated it: 'There he goes, the Lamb of God, even the Son of God!' I couldn't resist it, and anyway, it felt

like the Baptist himself was nudging us on. Like: time to move on, guys. Don't worry about me. Off you go.

And so we left him. Just like that and without looking back. I think I would have done so anyway, even without the Baptist's blessing. But leaving the Baptist was one thing. Introducing ourselves to Jesus quite another. How do you introduce yourself to the Lamb of God, the Son of God, even? To somebody so cosmic, so universal, so exceeding all your expectations? You know it's all beyond you before you even start.

So there we were, Andrew and I, following him stealthily and arguing about what to do next. It was ridiculous, really. You know how it goes: You talk to him! - No, you do! - But you know I stammer when I am overexcited. - Yeah, but you are better educated than me, you will know how to respond when he says something really deep. Etcetera. I'm sure Jesus must have noticed. All that whispering and hissing, and pushing and shoving going on behind him - he must have decided to put an end to our misery himself, bless him!

Suddenly he turned round - my heart was in my throat, I can tell you - and he asked: What are you looking for? What was I to say? I was looking for everything, for God, for the kingdom, for him. I was looking for holiness, for healing, not just for myself, but for all those wounded and hurting people that I had seen over the past months, for this whole broken, miserable, sinful world. I was longing for God's presence. Just to know that he was there, that we were fit to have him in our midst. That he would never go away again, or send us away into the barren lands. It was too much, of course, so it all got stuck in my throat, and I just blurted out: Rabbi, where are you staying? Imagine. You meet the Son of God, and the first thing you do is inquire about his lodgings! The stupid, trivial things we say when we just should kneel down and worship.

Jesus didn't seem to mind. He simply said: Come and see. And we went with him - he was staying at the house of Mary, Martha and Lazarus, who became great friends over time. It all snowballed from there. I would have been happy to stay put and just listen to his teachings, but the next day Andrew went to find Simon, and others joined us in the days that followed. And then we had those extraordinary three years of his ministry among us. Our whole outlook on life was changed completely. And when we thought it had all ended in hopeless misery, there was this great breakthrough to unexpected and unimagined abundant new life.

And you know what? Telling you all this has cleared my mind. Rabbi, where are you staying? It was not such a stupid question after all. He gave it a deeper meaning. When he answered Come and see, it was not just about the house of his friends in Bethany. Not just about that day. Come and see - and for three years we did. We still do. We came and we saw - the Word of God, staying among us. God with us, Emmanuel forever.

I told you that just to start at the beginning did not feel very creative to me. I now realize that my meeting Jesus wasn't the beginning at all; it started long before that, and it was very creative indeed. Here's what comes to me now, and I wonder what you think of it: (pensive) In the beginning was the Word... and the Word was with God... and the Word was God...

(accelerating) And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, full of grace and truth...

Isn't that amazing? Isn't that just amazing?

Thank you for listening. It has been a great help. I will be fine with the rest of the story from here and when it's finished I'll make sure you get a copy!