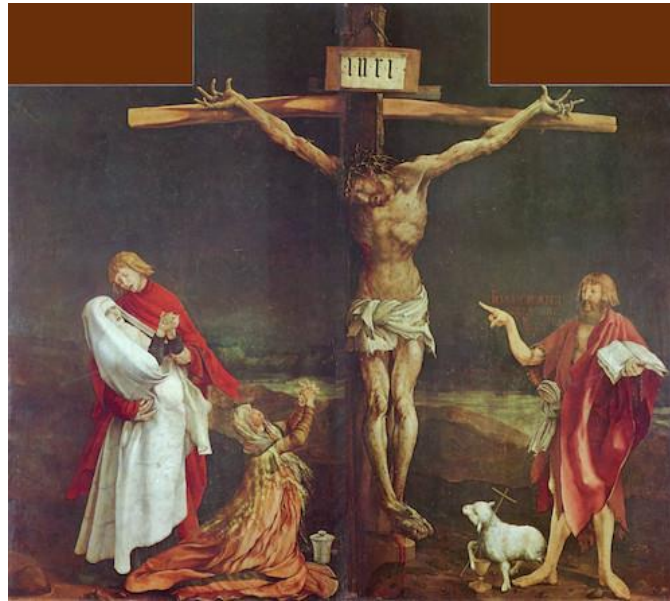


**2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Epiphany A**  
**Grace Lutheran Church**  
**Lakeland, FL**  
**January 14, 2023**

**Isaiah 49:1-7**  
**Psalms 40:1-11**  
**I Cor 1:1-9**  
**John 1:29-42**

Grace to you and peace from God and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Please pray with me. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

In great European cathedrals people often marvel at the beauty of the stained glass. They were there not merely for their beauty but because each window told a story that people could see because they were not able to read the story in Scripture. Over the weeks of Advent and Christmas and Epiphany our Altar Guild has been very busy with decorations and symbols and such that bring these seasons alive. And we have a stained glass of sorts in the framed needlework art that hangs in the choir loft. These pieces tell the story – the story we all long to hear time and time again. The art and images touch us in ways that words don't.



There is a piece of art created by Matthias Grunewald from 1506 to 1515. It is an altarpiece – 8 ½ feet high and 10 feet wide that he painted for the Monastery of St. Anthony at Isenheim in Alsace, France. A print of the altarpiece was displayed routinely in many of my classes in seminary. And a copy of it has hung in my office. This art beckons us in. It is a sacred icon of sorts.

How many of you were able to pull the image up on your phones? Please share with a neighbor if you were able. And for those who don't have the image, let me describe it for you.

It is a stark portrayal of Jesus' crucifixion with the cross in the center. To one side, the artist has placed the Mother of Jesus being embraced by the disciple John, the disciple whom Jesus loved. Mary Magdalene is kneeling at Jesus' feet with a small jar of ointment on the ground in front of her. And on the other side is John the Baptizer with a very elongated finger pointing to Jesus on the cross with one hand and holding an open book of the Scriptures in his other. There is a lamb

holding a cross at John's feet and a chalice nearby. It is an intriguing work. But the focal point of this work for me, second to Jesus on the cross, is that long finger of John pointing to Jesus. I've referred to it as the "Boney Finger."

John the Baptist with a boney finger. John is mentioned in each of the gospels – a very important figure. Unlike the John we meet in Matthew and Mark and Luke, here in the Gospel of John, we get a very different picture of John the Baptizer – in fact, we get virtually no picture at all. There is no wild honey, no locusts, no camel hair, no belt, no title – simply his name – John and the statement that he came to be a witness to testify of Jesus. He had a boney finger pointing to Jesus.

And in today's Gospel reading Jesus is walking toward him and John exclaims, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." "This is the One!"

And because of this testimony, two of John's disciples turned and followed Jesus. And then there was a very interesting conversation with three phrases that we will meditate on today, each of which has a literal and a symbolic meaning.

Jesus saw them following and he turned and asked them – What are you looking for? This is exactly the same question that was asked of Mary Magdalene by Jesus in the Garden after his resurrection. Yes, Jesus was asking them why they were following him. That was the literal level of the question. But there was more to it than that. Jesus was asking them, what are you looking for that will give meaning to your life? What is it that you want to find for your life?

All of us are looking for something; all of us are seekers and travelers on a journey of the spirit. All of us are looking for that which gives our life meaning. Some of us are looking for a deeper relationship with God and a deeper understanding of God's action in our lives. Some of us are looking for a closer relationship with our loved ones. Some of us are looking for forgiveness; some want a way to forgive another person. Some of us seek ways to help other people. Some are looking for fellowship with others on the journey.

The fact of the matter is that all of us want something, need something, or we wouldn't be here. All of us are wounded somehow, we all have holes in our souls. We travel through life, bumping and bruising our way from one day to the next looking for healing, looking for hope, looking for happiness. Jesus wants to hear us give voice to that. So he asks, What are you looking for?

Then after Jesus asked these two what they were looking for, they responded with an interesting question of their own. They asked Jesus – "Where are you staying?" A good question. It seems that Jesus was new in town, wasn't from around those parts. But that word "staying" in the Greek is *meno* and it is used elsewhere in John to refer to much more than lodging. It has to do with relationship. It's the word that is used later when Jesus tells us to abide in him just as a branch abides in the vine. It is the word used to describe the Holy Spirit when it descended at Jesus' baptism and remained over Jesus as it hovered over the waters of creation. Those restless spirits in the two men who followed after Jesus wanted to know where it was that Jesus placed himself – this one who is the Word of God made flesh.

And then Jesus responds to them with three little words, "Come and see." The word, "come" can be understood, again, on a literal level – Jesus was saying, "Come along with me and I'll show you my room." And on a deeper level, Jesus is saying come with me, come follow after me. He calls them to change their position, to change their journey, to change their destination.

My friend and artist, Jan Richardson, has described it this way:

**Come and see.** In all of the gospels, this is one of the most profound and challenging invitations Jesus will extend. Jesus is not beckoning them to a superficial seeing; what he offers them will demand more than a glance or a cursory look. The Greek word translated here as **see** comes from **horao**, which can be translated as **perceive, understand, recognize, experience**. Jesus is calling these disciples to the kind of seeing that opens a door, a seeing that draws us into a journey that will change us in ways we cannot know or imagine at the outset.

And this coming and seeing on their part was so important in their lives, that the gospel-writer notes the time of day it occurred. Four o'clock in the afternoon. Haven't we each had those kinds of experiences? We remember the time that a baby is born, the time of a wedding, we remember that last day at work before retirement. Life-changing events. Being a follower of Jesus is a life-changing event.

So it is for us – Jesus invites us to come and see, to follow him and understand things in a different way because of that following; to stay with him, to abide in him and see things in a different way because of that abiding. And all of this so that we like John may give witness to Jesus, the Lamb of God. That we – each of us individually and we as a community of faith – may be like that boney finger pointing to Jesus.

Amen. May it be so.