

John 1:29-42a

It seems to me that John, in our text, would not have made a good businessman. What kind of businessman tells his customers to shop somewhere else? If Wendy's put up a sign pointing to the McDonald's across the street, eventually the Wendy's would go out of business. This is what John was doing. He was pointing his disciples to Jesus. He was, in effect telling them, "Don't eat my food; eat over there. Jesus' food is much better than mine."

And they did. John's followers began to follow Jesus. And they went out and brought still other followers for Jesus. The McDonald's was booming with customers, but the Wendy's was shrinking. And eventually it went out of business. Not only were faithful disciples following Jesus; in time, multitudes followed after Him. But John...before long he found himself sitting in the cell of a dungeon. That's what happens when you don't adhere to sound business principles.

But then it never was God's intention that John would keep his followers. Even John knew this. "*He must increase,*" he said of Jesus, "*and I must decrease.*" John was never meant to be the final destination. John could never, and would never say of himself, "I am the Lamb of God," "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest." Never did John claim for himself that which belonged only to Jesus. John was called to set up shop down by the Jordan, but then point all who came to him away from himself to Jesus.

And that's pretty much what we do here. I've had people come out of church and tell me, "I'm not here for you." I think it was meant to be critical, but they're actually right. No one goes to the circus for the ringmaster. People go for the circus acts. The ringmaster is there simply to introduce and point the people to the various performers. The church is no circus, but anyone who comes to church for the pastor is missing the point. The pastor is John the Baptist constantly pointing to Christ in the font, in the Holy Supper, in the words that are heard. A minister who does not point to Christ is a false pastor, just as John would have been a false prophet had he not pointed his disciples to Jesus. Some people get all hung up over the pastor. Either they love him too much or they hate him too much. John was not out by the Jordan to be loved or hated. He was there to point sinners to Jesus.

This pointing is so absolutely crucial because someone besides John is doing a lot pointing. Satan is pointing. He is pointing his accusing finger at you. The Bible tells us that the devil is constantly pointing out our sins to God. He is called the accuser for good reason. There are only two things he does, and he does them night and day...he tempts, and he accuses. Satan knows that God is the eternal Judge, so he doesn't want God to miss any act of disobedience that you and I have done. Big or little, Satan is all over it, pointing to your sin with his accusing finger.

And that finger really hurts. He doesn't give us a minute of peace. His goal is not to drive us to repentance, as God's accusing Law does, so that we seek forgiveness from the pastor. His goal is to drive us to despair over our sins. If you have ever thought that your sin is too great to be forgiven, this is Satan pointing his finger at you. If you have ever stayed away from the Sacrament because you felt your sinfulness made you unworthy, this is the finger of Satan accusing you. When you put your head on your pillow and ask for forgiveness for the wrong done that day, if sleep escapes you because your sins still bother you, this is Satan pointing his finger at you.

And what makes his finger especially painful is that we know he's right. We have done the sins of which he accuses us. Everything he points to in our life is plain old disobedience on our part. We are guilty. The evidence is there. God's Law is in agreement. We have been unfaithful. We have lied. He

have been spiritually lazy. We have been irresponsible. We have dishonored father and mother. The list is endless, and Satan delights in pointing out every single sin on it.

But here stands John the Baptist pointing to Christ: "*Behold the Lamb of God,*" he cries, "*Who takes away the sin of the world.*" The finger of John is pointing you away from your sin to Him who takes your sin away. Here stands the font before your eyes. You are washed in the waters of baptism. You died to sin there, and were raised to a new life in Christ. Jesus' innocence now covers you. God refuses to look at your sin. He sees only Jesus who covers you.

Here stands the altar where you come to receive your Savior. In bread and wine you are given assurance. Jesus' body and blood protect you from the devil's accusations. Jesus took your place on the cross. He became the one accused for you. Every sin of yours was laid on Jesus. You did not lie...Jesus did. You did not commit adultery...Jesus did. You did not dishonor your parents...Jesus did. Jesus took Satan's bony finger and pointed it to Himself. He counted it pure joy to do this for you because He loves you. You're innocent. Jesus became the guilty one. Satan's accusations have no weight against you. God refuses to listen to the devil. Jesus died for you. You are forgiven. Here in the Sacrament is Jesus' own flesh and blood to assure you that you are one for whom He died. Here is real forgiveness. Here is real food--the Bread of Life. The more you come up for Jesus' holy meal, the more your faith is strengthened, the less the devil's accusations hurt you, the better you sleep at night--at peace with God and the world.

Now brothers and sisters in Christ, since John is pointing us to Jesus, how can we possibly point our fingers at each other? When there is tension in our marriages, in our families, why do we blame and accuse one another? Jesus already took our blame. He died for all of us as the one who was accused. The more you and I point our fingers at each other, the less we look at Jesus. Let's not help Satan accuse those whom God has forgiven. He has forgiven you. He has forgiven your spouse, your children, your parents. He has forgiven each member of your congregation. He has forgiven your pastor. Satan loves to accuse, but God loves to forgive. So let's point with our fingers, but not at each other. Let's, ourselves, point to Jesus. He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world...all sin...even yours. Amen.