

John 1:29-41

Every serious hunter can tell you how valuable his dog is. More than a companion, a good hunting dog is the hunter's right arm. It's fascinating to watch the dog when it has smelled out a pheasant. It freezes motionless in its tracks, pointing with its head and body directly toward the target. As its master approaches, the dog doesn't move a muscle. It keeps pointing at the pheasant even though the pheasant is well hidden from view. It points straight ahead as though its life depended on it. Nothing, at that time, could keep the dog from doing what it has been trained to do.

John the Baptist was also trained to point. His vocation—his whole life—was all about pointing, not toward pheasants, but toward sheep. And not just any old sheep, but just one. The One who came walking out to the Jordan, and when John saw Him, he stopped everything. You might say he froze in his tracks. And to all the “hunters” who were there with him—hunting for God's Messiah; for forgiveness, life, and salvation—John pointed. He pointed to Jesus and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”

When a hunting dog points, it points at something which is about to die. The pheasant it points to will be killed and eaten. And so does John. He pointed to God's Lamb, the Messiah—to Him who was born to suffer and die, so that He, too, would be eaten, devoured by starving sinners like you and me, who come to His altar and receive the meal of His flesh and blood for the forgiveness of our sins. “For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.”

He is here today—Jesus. And that is why we are here. We gather in His Name to receive Him who gave Himself for us. And so also is John here. For his voice still cries out within these walls. For 145 years, with each pastor who stood up here proclaiming the Savior, there was John pointing to Jesus. Today John does not point to Jesus walking, as he did by the Jordan. But he points to the font, and he points to the Holy Supper, and he points to the Words of Absolution, and he cries, “Behold...here in these holy things is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”

And when John faithfully points to Jesus, there are two things that are going to happen. First, those who belong to Him, follow Him. We see this in our text. John (a different one) and Andrew were disciples of John the Baptist. But when he stood pointing to Christ, declaring Him to be the Lamb of God, John and Andrew began to follow Jesus. They both became His disciples. One, a powerful voice in the church. The author of five books of the Bible. A trusted confidant of Jesus—one of the three who followed Him everywhere. The other, not so well known, but just as vital to the church, for he brought his brother, Simon Peter, to Jesus.

Because John has been faithfully pointing to Christ here for the past 145 years, you who belong to Him, also follow Him. You follow Him who is God's Lamb. And you recognize Him, for God has given you the faith that His Lamb is, for you, forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

There are only two things you can do with a lamb—you can wear its clothing, and you can eat it as a meal. Christ is your Lamb whom you follow. The “whiteness” of His wool

covers you as a beautiful garment. As the prophet Isaiah declares, “Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as wool.” From the day when you were brought to Jesus at the font, He has laid upon you His holy innocence. You are covered in the pureness of His wool, so that not one stain of sin can be seen by the Heavenly Father. You are a sinner in Sheep’s clothing—beautiful in appearance to your God.

But you’re not just dressed in Christ, you also feed upon Christ, who makes you clean within. For thousands of years, lambs were slaughtered, their blood shed and their body eaten. From the Passover lamb in Egypt, to all the lambs sacrificed by God’s people in the temple, to the cross, where once and for all God’s Lamb was killed so that by His blood we are made thoroughly clean of all our sins and wickedness. And coming to His altar, His body and blood He freely gives us, so that we remain steadfast in Him—forgiven even unto eternal life in heaven.

When John points to Jesus, the first thing that happens is that God brings you, His people, to follow His Lamb. And in following Him, your sins are forgiven, your faith is nourished by His flesh and blood.

Now something else happens when John faithfully points to Jesus, and that second thing is...Satan rises up against those who follow Christ. As we observe the lives of Andrew and John, we see how they suffered persecution for remaining faithful to the Lord. Thrown into jail; beaten for proclaiming Christ; John, later, was exiled on the island of Patmos; Andrew was martyred along with the rest of the Apostles. Satan tries with all his might to stop John from pointing to the Lamb of God. And he tries with all his might to prevent those who belong to Jesus from following Him.

For 145 years, just as John has been here pointing to Jesus, so has the devil been here. In fact, if John had not been so faithful in pointing to Christ, Satan would have left you alone. But the faithful church will always be the persecuted church. For the devil hates for Christ’s people to follow Him. And he is devious and relentless in his attacks. He knows the weaknesses of each congregation; of each individual Christian; of each pastor. He knows when and where to lay his evil traps.

He knows that he must keep us away from the Lamb of God, so he calls John a liar, telling us that Christ is not found in His Word and Sacraments. He tells us that we don’t need to go to these Means of Grace very often—Christmas and Easter is enough, or at best no more than once every three or four months.

Satan knows to divide before conquering, and so he causes bickering among Christ’s followers. He breaks up marriages and families; he turns fellow members against each other. Even the most faithful followers are guilty of falling for Satan’s schemes.

Over the past 145 years there is much sin here that we repent of; many quarrels here that we are sorry about; much spiritual laziness here that we confess we are guilty of. But as long as John is pointing to Jesus, we have hope. For that Lamb of God who is in the font, and in His Holy Supper, and in the Words of His Gospel—that Lamb is our forgiveness.

By the grace of God you are followers of Christ. And in that grace you stand, covered by the blood of God’s Lamb, forgiven of all your sins—righteous and innocent in the eyes of

your God. May God in His grace, keep John faithful in pointing to Jesus here for the next 100 years, and the next, and the next...so that we, together with our children and their children's children, follow Him who is God's Lamb, our Savior and our Lord—Jesus Christ in whom we have eternal life. For He is the One who takes away the sin of the world. Amen.