

When GPS devices for cars were new and no one yet had cell phones, a couple who had been in our Bible Study of JOHN, traveled to England and rented a car to drive themselves on back roads. Today, when you miss a turn “the device intended you to take”, it instantly plots the next or recommends: MAKE A U-TURN. In those days, in America, the GPS had an annoying voice announce: “RECALCULATING”. However, when making a wrong turn this couple in England were delighted that the device in their British Rental would call attention with trumpets to announce “BEHOLD!” Behold, whether in the King James Bible or a British Rental GPS, is announcement of something New taking place, as if to state what is about to happen is different from Everything before: Do Not Miss: BEHOLD.

Previously in Matthew’s Gospel we read the genealogy of Joseph, of the unmarried betrothal to Mary resolving to not shame her, but being warned in a dream by an Angel to love her. Then, John the Baptist called people to REPENTANCE and all Judea and Galilee came to be Baptized as John warned the Pharisees and Saducees of their FALSE MODESTY & FALSE FAITH. When Jesus came to be baptized by John, and Matthew narrated how as Jesus came up out of the water the HEAVENS OPENED and the Holy Spirit came down upon him like a dove from heaven. Clearly the Empire of Rome, the Jewish historic leadership of Saducees and Pharisees had been completely unaware of these things passing by. Because, what follows begins with “BEHOLD!”

Leadership continued to spar and challenge JOHN, who he really is and what authority he claims to have. Is John THE MESSIAH, or ELIJAH returned from Heaven to announce the Messiah’s coming, or A PROPHET? And John in sincere humility and faith describes, like Pastor Diane and I do: “We baptize with Water, but among you stands one you do not know.”

The author even gives us the Stage-cue: This all happened at Bethany on the other side of the Jordan. IS THE JORDAN RIVER SIGNIFICANT?

Following the Passover, the Egyptians chased the Hebrews to the Red Sea, which God parted for them... For 40 years they searched the Wilderness to cross the JORDAN into the Promised Land... As they crossed over JORDAN, Joshua had the Levites take up stones to mark the place... Naaman the Syrian General with Leprosy came to Elisha who told him to wash in the JORDAN to be clean... For 70 years Judah was deported to Babylon and returning they crossed the JORDAN... So YES, that John’s Baptism took place on the other side of the WATER OF JORDAN, is significant!

At which, John calls out: BEHOLD, THE LAMB OF GOD, WHO TAKES AWAY THE SINS OF THE WORLD! For those in the Monday Bible Study who have been reading Genesis, Recall When Abraham took his son up the Mountain to sacrifice, instead GOD provided for Abraham the sacrifice of a Ram in the Bushes.

For those who are in the Tuesday class on the Temple at the time of Jesus, Recall that The whole point of Worship in Judaism was Sacrifice for our sins. We are separate from God because we have sinned and need to be forgiven. The means of ATONEMENT FOR SIN was sacrifice particularly with Passover of a Lamb for every family. The defining act of Israel, they had been Slaves of Pharaoh when they cried out to GOD and GOD heard them, and because they each sacrificed for their sins, God saved them from Pharaoh!

Here, John the Baptist Names Jesus AS The LAMB OF GOD. (Can I get a BEHOLD!)

I have shared previously that, my mother’s heart went into Arrhythmias during my Birth and she died. There was absolute chaos in the delivery room. My Birth Certificate is a mess. Someone tried to fill in this permanent Legal Record with hand-written temporary immediate information. NAME says: ~~Baby Boy~~, Father’s Name: ~~Unknown~~, Race: ~~Unknown~~, each of which are crossed out and the correct information later typed above.

Jesus had been called a lot of things: MARY’s ILLEGITIMATE SON, or a more derogative version of that,

CARPENTER'S GOPHER, NAZARENE, "Jesus as the Lamb of God" is a whole lot better!

LAMB OF GOD elevates what is happening. No longer is this about Baptism, about Pharisees & Saducees, or even about John. John knows and even says, I am immediate, temporary, I baptize with Water in the here and now, but the LAMB OF GOD (BEHOLD!) this will change things resolving Sin, resolving our relationship with GOD for all time.

The text emphasizes this, because the GREEK verb "MENO" can mean REMAIN or STAY, which is used 4 X, twice by John in emphasizing (not the Heavens Opening), but that the SPIRIT OF GOD REMAINED on Jesus. Two unnamed Disciples of John the Baptist follow Jesus. Can you not see them running after him, hiding behind buildings or Vessels? Jesus does not ask: "WHO ARE YOU?" or "WHAT DO YOU WANT?" Jesus asks "WHAT ARE YOU SEEKING? WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FOR?" And yet again they ask "Where are you REMAINING/Where are you STAYING?" Which is an odd question to ask. EXCEPT that WHAT ARE YOU SEEKING is the question WE ALWAYS ASK. "What do you SEEK to be when you grow up? Where do you come from? Who were you parents? What did you SEEK in the Military? What did you SEEK in school? Whom do you SEEK to marry? Where do you want to Live/to REMAIN? What do you SEEK to do in Retirement? What do you SEEK in a Church?" ALL THESE can be answered by Jesus' Question: WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FOR?

Christianity is different from all other Religions. Jesus is different! Instead of Jesus saying WHAT DOES THE LAW of MOSES SAY? Or WHAT DOES THE KORAN SAY? Instead of trying to explain Theological Doctrine and Eschatology, Jesus simply says: "COME & SEE!" Our faith is caught up in our personal story.

American Poet Kathleen Norris tells the story of her moving back to the small town in South Dakota where her family had lived before her move to Hawaii. She describes having been in a Tavern with an old Cowboy, who sought her out because she came from one of the "Old Families." He told her the story of how 150 years ago his Great-Grandfather had made a Side-Saddle as a wedding gift for his bride, and this man still had it. Suddenly in the conversation the man said, "WHO ARE WE AND WHERE WE COME FROM..."

That is the real question of life isn't it? Before she could respond he smiled saying "AND HERE WE ARE TELLING EACH OTHER OUR FAVORITE LIES!"

"STORIES" she laughed "CALL THEM STORIES!" He slapped the table "STORIES, THAT IS WHO WE ARE."

We as a Church have been here 45 years. We were once the FASTEST GROWING CHURCH in the Country! Like the people who wept at the rebuilding of the Temple in our Call to Worship from EZRA, we are a people with great hopes, we have known Adventures, we have also known stories of deep pain & sadness. As Presbyterians, we are a people who came from Scotland on the Mayflower, a people who look to our Constitution for Guidance.

HOWEVER, something new and different was added as a PREFACE to our CONSTITUTION in 2015, A PREFACE, as a way of saying, in order to understand this story, you need to understand this FOUNDATION of WHAT WE SEEK. What these REFORMERS named as our FOUNDATION is that as The Church, WE SEEK THE MISSION OF GOD.

Who we are, what we believe, what we are committed to: is not only the story of 2,000 years ago, or 8,000 beginning with Moses; We are also a people who read and apply that STORY *LOOKING FOR* what GOD IS DOING IN THIS TIME & PLACE!

I have been a Preacher for just less than 40 yrs, who grew up as a Preacher's Kid. I have known and loved High Church and Low Church, Bible Studies, and Choirs, Organ, Piano and Bells, Taize and Ecumenical. But along the way, I came to see that where the church comes to life, what makes Church's vital and exciting is not political positions, not building campaigns, not controversies. What makes Churches "THE

CHURCH IN THIS PLACE & TIME," what empowers churches to overcome adversity, and individuals to live through struggle is MISSION.

I need to be very specific here, because MISSION is not CHARITY OR Being A NONPROFIT.

MISSION IS MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN PEOPLE'S LIVES, SEEKING HOW GOD IS MAKING ALL THINGS NEW...

BEHOLD!