

"The True Champion"

OT: Psalm 40:1-11

NT: John 1:29-42

John 1:29-42

The next day he (John the Baptist) saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"³⁰ This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'³¹ I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel."³² And John testified, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him."³³ I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.'³⁴ And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God."

³⁵ The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples,³⁶ and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!"³⁷ The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus.³⁸ When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, "What are you looking for?" They said to him, "Rabbi" (which translated means Teacher), "where are you staying?"³⁹ He said to them, "Come and see." They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon.⁴⁰ One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother.⁴¹ He first found his brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated Anointed).⁴² He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas" (which is translated Peter).

The Word of God for the People of God. **Thanks be to God.**

There is a lot going on in this passage of scripture. It actually begins before verse 29 with a section in which John is asked, "Who are you?" Without giving an answer of who he is personally, John responds by telling of the One who is coming. It is quite a testimony to tell of the One and only God when asked about yourself. The next day the text tells us that the One and only then walked before them, giving John the opportunity to not just speak of Jesus but point directly to him. And when Jesus is pointed out, he cares enough to stop and address them. And what he says is quite a remarkable thing to think about, "What are you looking for?" It was as though Jesus knew they didn't quite know what they were looking for: in a Messiah perhaps, in life. Almost like they were a ship sailing without a course. Like the question "Who are you?", "What are you looking for?" is loaded with incentive and inspiration to ponder. The conclusion of the text then reveals a personal encounter between Jesus and Andrew and Peter. In this encounter it is clear once again the people had been looking, hoping,

waiting, for the Messiah. It is no small matter what happens to Peter then as Jesus changes his name on the spot, with symbolism toward the charge, “upon this rock, in which the name Peter means, I will build my church.” See, there is a lot going on, but it all points in one direction, at Jesus.

The Westminster catechism, one of our foundational creeds and confessions outlining what it is we believe about God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, the Bible, the church, and what it means to live a faithful life, begins with the question, “What is humanities main purpose?” The answer is “To glorify God.”

To glorify God can include a variety of things. No doubt it means to love God, love one another, and love our neighbors. No doubt it means to read the bible. No doubt it means to worship God, praise God, honor God in all we say and do. A few less obvious examples of glorifying God can include leaning on God, for God wants us to depend on God, and leaning on one another, for God wants us to be intertwined and supportive of one another.

Another important consideration in glorifying God is to be a faithful child of God. And to know how and what it looks like to be a faithful child of God requires following the teachings and example of the One and only Son of God, the Messiah.

The people were looking for a savior, someone who would deliver them from all they knew to be wrong and suffering in this world. The text Alex read in Psalm 40 illustrates this longing. They longed for a connection with God. And what did God do. God stood in support and providence. And then, when the time was right, once and for all, God sent them a savior, a Messiah, to deliver all from the struggles and sufferings of this world. But God didn't just zip and zip out. God stayed a while among the people. Why? What God knew beyond their need for a savior and Messiah, was the gift of Jesus as their personal connection to God, who would be a living embodiment for how to live life in such a way that honors and pleases God.

What were the people looking for? Yes, deliverance from sin and suffering. Yes, a way out of the oppression from Roman rule. Perhaps more than either of those was a longing for wisdom to know of a grand purpose for life, strength to endure, courage and hope to overcome fears, peace in the heart that surpasses understanding, and love as the ultimate thread within our relationships with others.

Like Muhammad Ali did with swagger and confidence, so did John the Baptist in announcing Jesus, the Lamb of God. (*Drum roll...*) “The Champ is here”. (2x) “The True Champion is here.”

Ladies and Gentlemen, "Here he is".

Wearing pure white with "Lamb of God" and "Great I AM" stitched in gold.

Best known for his power to walk on water, bring sight to the blind and the dead to life; even the waves and winds and seas obey his command.

He is faithful, pure, blameless, powerful, loving, forgiving, merciful, peaceful, full of spirit and truth; He is the Alpha and Omega; He is Savior; He is Messiah.

He got whipped and stripped and knocked down but rose from the grave never to be knocked down again. He takes away the sin of the world.

He is your reigning and undefeatable champion, the One and only Son of God, King of Kings, Lord of Lords, and Prince of Peace: *Jeeeeeeeeesuuuuuuuus Chriiiiiiiiiiiiiist!!!!*

For John, Jesus is the only One that matters. There is no need to harp on the negative and darkside. The challenger doesn't stand a chance, no matter how many times he tries. Jesus is the True Champion of the world, heaven and earth. The fight Jesus and God won for all, for you and for me, has, is, and will always stand the test of time. God's fight on our behalf has gifted us with not only life on earth with hope and promise, but an eternal award of life everlasting with God.

John the Baptist knows just how special Jesus is and does all the announcing Jesus needs: "Here he is... *(drum roll)* the true champion is here."

And this is the coolest. For those present that day to witness John's announcement, Jesus says "Come and see. There is no one like me. Follow me."

Life was, and still is more often than we like, confusing and challenging. The early Israelites believed in the Promised Land from God but knew the world around them wasn't what it was supposed to be. They prayed and God answered. They wanted a warrior and they got the greatest champion they could ever ask for. True, Jesus did things a little differently, but aren't we glad, because that means we get to be the benefit of Jesus' power as well? God knew, and knows now, that life isn't just a physical fight. The fight is spiritual, emotional, and intellectual. God sent Jesus to be the champion of things no one else could touch.

That day, when John announced Jesus' presence, the disciples were given the opportunity of a lifetime. It was clear they weren't well prepared for what they were going to experience. They were working, doing their jobs and making an honest living. Then comes Jesus and he says "Come and see": walk with me to do God's work. Jesus' invitation to be in his corner was to be a part of the greatest team ever. Jesus was inviting them, through faith and his leadership and power, to come be champions alongside him.

Just like the disciples, we are invited to have faith in Jesus and follow his teachings and example to live faithfully as God's children. Doing so means we too can be champions, champions of our lives.

That is why we are here isn't it? To learn what it means to be a faithful child of God and be inspired to act obediently to God's will. So, we can glorify God in all we say and do.

In many ways, we already know what it is like to follow champions. We like to follow champions and if we are able, copy what they do, because we believe somehow, we might be able to be a champion too if we can copy. Now, when we think of champions we likely turn to the sports world. If you play basketball, you probably want to shoot like Steph Curry. The Golden State Warriors have been pretty good at basketball lately 😊 In golf, champions are crowned each week, but Rory McIlroy still reigns as Fedex Cup Champ and what amateur wouldn't want to play golf like him. If you are a swimmer, and you can swim like Katie Ledecky you are on the right track. For all of the Georgia fans out there, I would be remiss not to mention their reign as College Football Champions. You get the picture. We have champions in our heads we long to watch and embody. This is true for our careers as well: a doctor we admire, a business partner, a teacher, a mentor. Here is the thing. And yes, I am going to be a downer for a moment, not because I don't admire and respect these people, I do, but because they, one day, will wear out, get beaten, and no longer be champions. They will get knocked out of their reign and someone else will take their place.

But the good news for us, today and every day, is that as faithful children of God, we have the True Champion, Jesus, who will never be overcome and never be defeated.

Following the teachings and example of Jesus guide us in our endeavors toward being faithful children of God. What exactly will that require of us? That is where we will go each week between now and the first Sunday in Lent, which is February 26. We are going to start next week with "Constructive Contribution".

For today, we are asked a series of questions like "Who are you?" and "What are you looking for?", and as we seek to answer these pointing to the One and only Son of God, the True Champion, we are also asked "Whom will we follow and seek to copy?"

Let all God's people say... Amen.