

The Art of Introducing

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John 1:29-42

²⁹The next day John the Baptizer saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! ³⁰This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.’ ³¹I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel.”

³²And John testified, “I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. ³³I 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.’ ³⁴And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God.”

³⁵The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, ³⁶and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, “Look, here is the Lamb of God!”³⁷The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. ³⁸When 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?” ³⁹He 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. ⁴⁰One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. ⁴¹He first found his brother Simon and said to him, “We have found the Messiah” (which is translated Anointed). ⁴²He 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).

1 Corinthians 1-9

Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes, ²To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours: ³Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ⁴I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, ⁵for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind— ⁶just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you— ⁷so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁸He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

There is an art to making a good introduction. Introductions are important because they connect us with other people, and a good introduction can be the creative force to begin a significant relationship. Some people do it so well and with such ease. They know exactly what to say, giving the perfect tidbit of information to help one person come to know another, to create interest in a friendship or simply to spark a conversation. Others of us sometimes catch ourselves stumbling through awkward introductions, wondering, “Why did I say that?” And most of us, I imagine, have had the experience of being awkwardly introduced.

Pastor Lillian Daniel has written about how members of her family exaggerate every introduction into an automatic promotion. If she’s a doctor, suddenly she’s the most brilliant surgeon; If he’s an ordinary singer in a voluntary choir, on the lips of Lillian’s family, he becomes a stunningly brilliant musician. Of course, she points out these kinds of exaggerations just leave the one being introduced embarrassed.¹

There is an art to introducing, is there not? When it comes to introducing another person to Jesus Christ, my guess is more than a few of us are awkward in how to go about it. “*Evangelism* is a scary word even to many Christians,” writes Kathleen Norris. “I have often heard people who are dedicated members of the church say, ‘I’ll do anything else for this church, but don’t ask me to serve on the evangelism committee.’” Of course, at Bryn Mawr, we would never name a committee using the word *Evangelism*! Norris writes that for many, “evangelism” is a word that conjures up negative stereotypes of glad-handing proselytizers who make talk of Jesus uninviting with their language about “being saved,” or “born-again,” or my personal favorite, “being washed in the blood of the Lamb!” Norris remembers being asked to preach in her home church when the church was between pastors one summer. Somehow the bulletin cover for that day had come from a large evangelical publishing house announcing, “Summer Opportunities.” It suggested that as people spent time outdoors, at

¹ Lillian Daniel, “Grand Introductions,” *The Christian Century*, January 2002.

baseball games, picnics, or the beach, summer provided Christians with God-given opportunities to witness to their faith. To counter what she considered to be strange suggestions for mass-produced church bulletins on evangelism she remembers, “In my sermon I said that going up to people at a picnic and asking, “Do you know the Lord?” was a good way to get yourself stuck with a barbeque fork. And you would deserve it.”²

Then, however, she reflects about being grateful for the many and various ways her church had “evangelized” her, sharing the love of God through the little things they did and said, and giving her room to experience the invitation of the gospel. I think that would best describe how we go about sharing the love of God with people who come here looking for a church home. From the youngest children to senior adults who move to town and visit to check us out; we try to help them experience the invitation of the gospel.

But, when you get right down to it, as important as the ministry of hospitality is, that is a fairly passive way to invite people into the essential work of the church – to wait until someone walks in the door and only then to respond to their interest. Could it be that today the gospel is calling us to reconsider the urgency of authentic Christian evangelism at this moment in time? Because there are many things today that create urgency for sharing the good news of the gospel – the call to love, and to work for peace and justice. For example, we have a particular challenge when we think about how we might invite people into the community of Jesus Christ, a great stumbling block to our mastering the art of introduction. That is in the United States today, as in ages past, the Christian faith has often been co-opted by the powers of evil and used as a weapon to perpetuate violence, to deny certain people basic freedoms, to advance a political agenda that builds up walls among diverse people, to shut some people out and put others down. Currently, a perverted form of religion marches under many banners, but one of the most dangerous is so-called Christian nationalism. I say “so-

² Kathleen Norris, *Amazing Grace: A Vocabulary of Faith*, p. 300.

called” obviously, because from banning good books in elementary schools to perpetuating the most violent forms of racism, it is a movement that has wandered far from the pathway behind Jesus Christ.

Even some of the most conservative political commentators are taking on this perversion of Christianity. Ross Douthat has said, America has become “a religious landscape dominated by popular Christian ideas that have gone mad.”³ And self-identified conservative evangelical Michael Gerson, who worked in the George Bush White House, said in a *Washington Post* editorial last September before his untimely death two months later, that Christian Nationalism bears no resemblance to the teachings of Jesus.⁴ Any movement, he said, that perpetuates White Supremacy, racism and anti-Semitism, is defiling the country and Christianity itself. Any movement that advocates political violence, homophobia, xenophobia, and misogyny is also defiling the country and Christianity.

So, in these complicated times where people and organizations erroneously call themselves “Christian”, how do we heed the encouragement of John the Baptizer to point toward the new life offered by Jesus Christ, and how do we respond to the call of Christ to follow where he is leading us? With authentic commitment to the good work of God in Christ, how can we practice the art of introducing?

We can take a cue from what is happening in our story from John’s gospel this morning. This introduction of Jesus includes many names – John calls Jesus “Lamb of God,” two of his disciples call him, “Rabbi, Teacher,” and Andrew calls him “Messiah, the Anointed,” - but the story is a much more artful introduction to Jesus than a list of names. It has been revealed to John the Baptist, that Jesus is the Son of God. What does John do with that revelation about the identity of Jesus? John says to two of his own disciples, “Look, see for yourself, this is the one about

³ Ross Douthat, “The Americanization of Religion,” *New York Times*, 12/21/22

⁴ Michael Gerson, “Trump should fill Christians with Rage,” *Washington Post*, 9/1/22

whom I have been preaching.” John points them in the direction of Jesus that they might see for themselves. When John’s two disciples begin to follow Jesus, Jesus turns to them and meets them where they are. He doesn’t push an agenda, promote an orthodoxy or ideology. Instead, Jesus engages them, asking a question that gets to the heart of our human experience. “What,” Jesus asks, “are you looking for?” Encouraged by his approachability, his openness, Andrew and his friend decide to follow Jesus a little longer. They ask Jesus, “Where are you staying?” and a give-and-take relationship has begun. Jesus responds, “Come and see.” They go and they see, and they end up staying with Jesus all day, and then – of course - for the rest of their lives.

No single introduction of Jesus, this account seems to say, produces immediate faith and understanding. There is an art to introducing him so that others will want to “come and see” for themselves. We cannot fully convince someone what Jesus did and who Jesus is and why he continues to preoccupy our attention. All we can really do is what John did, and what his disciple Andrew did, which is to say, “Come and see...” Come join our journey in Jesus’ footsteps and you will see why I am committed to the work of the church. Come to a church school class with me, and you’ll see why I’m drawn to the intellectual rigor of asking deep questions about the relevance of our faith. Come to the monthly Casserole Blitz and you’ll see why my help feeding the poor helps me, feeds me. Come get involved in this congregation’s Anti-Racism initiatives, and you’ll see how we are learning about racism, our country, and our own complicity in oppressive structures. Come and see why we are trying to change how we act among a diverse human family, and ways we can make a difference in this community advocating for justice. Come to worship with me, because... I cannot even put into words why I come, but you might find a place here for yourself. That’s how the gospel urges us to authentic Christian, invitational evangelism, Come and See!

The pastoral staff and ministers of music are joining the church’s Anti-Racism Taskforce to help broaden the scope of our church’s work

toward justice and equality for all. Together we are reading Martin Luther King's last book, *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?* Looking for how this book was received when it was written just a year before his assassination, I came across an article remembering Martin Luther King, Jr., whose birth and witness we celebrate this weekend. I was struck by one descriptive introduction, because it's an artful invitation to embark with King on a greater journey.

The article said: "Some people know him as an American Gandhi. Indeed, he readily acknowledges Gandhi for insights into non-violent political change. Some people know him as an American Moses. He spoke in biblical terms naturally... about the deliverance of the people from American pharaohs and American bondage. Others knew him as an American Amos, with the dream of a prophet, with a word of judgment... that someday justice will roll down like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream. We should remember him, however, for what he was, first and foremost, and as he would want to be remembered. His situation may have been like that which Moses and Amos confronted, and the method may have been similar to that of Gandhi. But by his own confession, Martin Luther King, Jr. was a follower of Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus Christ supplied the spirit and motivation of his moment in our past, and of his movement."⁵

This introduction goes to the core of why—in our day of rising Christian Nationalism and other forms of racist white supremacy remembering Martin King is so important. Americans remember him because of his moment and his movement toward a more just society. Christians also celebrate his memory because of how he connected the Civil Rights Movement to following Jesus Christ. The work of justice, equity and equality is the work of Christ. Like John the Baptist and Andrew before him, King was artful in his introduction of Jesus, saying,

⁵ James Smylie, "Strength to Love: On Observing MLK's Birthday," *Presbyterian Outlook*, 1/15/81.

“Come and see...” Come and see the vision of the Kingdom of God that Jesus brought to bear upon the world, where the least are lifted up, the outsider welcomed in, the poor given a prime seat at the table, and the oppressed are set free. Being an evangelist for Jesus Christ is never a matter of coercion. Sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ is simply and boldly to offer an introduction to embark on a new way of seeing the love of God and putting it into action in the world. How can we – through the ministries of this church -- better show forth the love, peace, and justice of Jesus Christ? Come and see. Come and see...

Amen.