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[0:00] These things are written that you may know that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen. I've been very blessed in the last month or two in my diocesan role as we launched a podcast ministry that seems to be taking off more than I can explain how it is.

Last week, Bishop Julian said, I want to get this particular author who is the leading New Testament scholar in the origins of our canon.

You'd agree. He's like the best. For some crazy reason, the guy said yes and did an interview with us this week. I don't know why he did it, but he did. So I was somehow blessed as I was preparing for this sermon to listen to the leading expert in this area.

And he said something interesting in his interview, which will air in two weeks and you can listen to it. But his quote was, the question often is, how did the church choose the Gospels?

[1:28] And his position is, and he backs it up quite well, that that really is the wrong way to look at the issue. His quote was, rather than viewing the Gospels as something chosen by the church, I think it is better to see them as something handed down to the church.

In other words, we didn't choose our Gospels. They were given to us. We didn't choose them. In a sense, they chose us. And what an interesting corollary we have to our Gospel reading today and over the last few weeks.

Here we are. We've spent the last month in the first chapter of John. And what have we seen? A world looking for Jesus?

No, for he was in the world and the world was made through him, and yet the world did not know him. But certainly those of Israel, those who expected the Messiah, the chosen descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, they would welcome him with celebration.

But no, John tells us he came to his own and his own did not receive him. And that is the pattern set by Jesus here in John's Gospel.

[3:02] In the middle of darkness, in the pitch black world, comes the true light, the light of the world. And in the middle of a darkness that fights back against the light, the light begins to spread.

That light became man, and that man began to walk around the land. He was an idea, not a myth, not a bundle of noble propositions, not a set of rules, not thoughts and wishes.

But a man, a man with a mouth, a mouth that spoke truth. Legs that carried him to people and actually stood in front of them.

And eyes, eyes and a face that looked back at you. You had to look into them as he spoke truth to you. As he told you that he was in fact the word become flesh, the true light of the world.

In 2019, in this internet age, we've adapted and learned to hide from truth like a Gollum or a Schmeagel.

[4:07] We sit behind our keyboards and we choose the reality of our creation. The one that suits our desires, and then we hide in this little cave we've made for ourselves.

We're not held accountable because we are utterly self-absorbed. But what happens when you can't hide from truth? When there is nowhere to hide?

Because truth is a man and he is speaking to you and he looks into your very soul and you have to give an answer. Truth with a face cannot be ignored.

He either wakes you from your slumber or you run farther into the night. But you can no longer hide because the light exposes your darkness and you can't deny it anymore.

And as Jesus walks around the land, we see lost wretches beginning to wake up. Last week we saw John the Baptist confronted by Jesus and we saw John transformed.

[5:18] For when the truth came to him, he cried out, Behold the Lamb of God and confess that Jesus was the Son of God. John the Baptist is forever changed by the presence of the Lamb.

The next day again as Jesus walks by. We see in our reading today, if you'd like to turn there, John chapter 1, verse 35. He nudges two of his disciples and he points to him and says again, Behold the Lamb of God.

And here's the thing, as modern readers, we've really lost the significance of this because we've lost the concept of discipleship. Disciples would follow a rabbi.

They would usually commit to them at around the age of 15. You'd begin to learn from them. In the Jewish world, the main focus was in order to learn the Torah.

But it was not just mental knowledge, memorization. It was about application. How does one live the Torah? And every rabbi kind of had their different interpretation.

[6:34] And the disciples sought to imitate the Master. The rabbi had to first agree to accept the student. Sometimes there were conditions that had to be met.

Various, various kinds. There was actually one, one tradition that's very similar to the story of the rich, young ruler, not with Christ. Another rabbi who saw someone that was rich and just decided, I don't want a rich guy to be my disciple.

So he made him sit on a bench with the poor until his robe was sufficiently dirty and said, Now you can be my disciple. And the time the disciple spent with the rabbi was obsessive by today's standards.

Everywhere the master went, the disciple went too. As a matter of fact, the law of the land at one point had to make a rule that a married disciple had to check in with his wife at least once every 30 days.

By virtue of this discipleship relationship, the rabbi laid claim to the disciple. In other words, once you were the member of a rabbi's school, you belonged there for life.

[7:54] It's nothing like my own bachelor's degree, which consists of five different schools, as I jump from one to another to another. You couldn't just jump from teacher to teacher.

However, the changing of masters of rabbis for a disciple was not completely unheard of. It wasn't impossible, but it was rare.

You've probably only heard of it once in a lifetime, and it would make the entire community talk. Because a disciple was so indoctrinated by his rabbi, the only way a disciple could move from one rabbi's school to another rabbi's school was if the first master, the first rabbi, in his style of teaching, in his convictions, and in his practice, became in his own mind convinced that the new rabbi was greater than he.

So the statement we saw last week from John was great, but it was a statement. How do we know that he believed it? That he truly believed that the one who came after him, sandals, he was not even worthy to untie?

We know this because he points to Jesus as he walks by and tells two of his disciples, there is the Lamb of God. Truly, John decreases as he demonstrates by practice that he is inferior to Jesus, that there is a rabbi, a teacher, one who is worthy to be followed.

[9:39] Quick note, in today's reading, we only have the calling of five disciples. If you want to read up on the other seven, you're going to have to go to another gospel. John's main concern here is not to give a Wikipedia history article of the calling of the twelve, although I'll be very quick to say that this is 100% historically accurate.

But John gives us these accounts to show us how, as the light of the world becomes flesh incarnate enters the world, how he changes it in the hearts of men forever.

While John the Baptist proceeds, the question is, will his two disciples take this new master? Will they accept John the Baptist's assessment of the superiority of Jesus?

We have two disciples here. One's unnamed. Most suspected, this is John. Not John the Baptist, but the author of our gospel. The other disciple is Andrew, and we see in these two a remarkable conversion from a disciple of John to a disciple of Jesus.

Now, the exchange here is a little odd for us. Jesus turns to them and asks them, what are you seeking? And the answer doesn't make sense, because it doesn't really answer the question that Jesus asks him.

[11:00] It seems like they're avoiding his question. But Jesus knows what they really want. They're hanging out in the background like a group of fans.

They want to get in the inner circle, in the VIP room. And Jesus' question is a socially acceptable way for them to make a request to him. To let them ask for what their hearts really desire. They first call him rabbi or teacher. They had no obligation to do that, by the way. It wasn't required of them to be polite or socially acceptable.

They have named for themselves a new master. And with a new master comes a new way of life. When they ask to see the place where you're staying, they're asking to take up residence in the life school of Jesus.

These things took place in Bethany, across the Jordan, at the tenth hour, which by Jewish reckoning is about four o'clock in the afternoon.

[12:10] So in other words, it is too late for them to get anywhere. We don't know for sure where they're heading, but I was with Ray around Jerusalem. It's at four o'clock at night. You better be really close to where you're staying, or you're not going to make it in time.

So they come and stay with him. It was too late in the day to travel to another town. But Jesus' invitation to come and see ushers them into a new life.

From now on, they will eat, sleep at the same place he is. They will hang on every word he says, both in the public square and in those precious private moments of instruction they have along with him.

From now on, Jesus will be with them until the end of the age. And as you read today's reading, do you, like me, get the sense that we are watching a fire be lit?

This is the beginning of what we know as evangelism. The light comes into the world and sets John the Baptist's heart on fire.

[13:26] And the first thing he does is tell his disciples. And that spark spreads to Andrew. And he can't help but tell his brother Simon. Disciples of Jesus can't stop bringing others to Jesus.

And Andrew announces that he has found the promised Messiah. The Christ.

Christ is a term used to speak of the anointed one. Same way you would Christian or anoint a king. When someone calls Jesus the Christ, it's not his last name.

It is a title given to him. And it's saying, Jesus, the chosen king of God. Consider the progression on this account as we've spent the last four weeks in John.

Verse 29. John. Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Verse 34. I have borne witness that this Jesus is the Son of God.

[14:33] And now Andrew in verse 41. We have found the promised Messiah, the Christ. Truly, salvation is in the name of the Lord.

And Jesus takes one look at Simon and gives him a new name. Petros. Cephas. And Presto chango. We have another man transformed forever.

This time his entire identity left behind. And then they go to Bethsaida. Small little Bethsaida. Bethsaida means fish village. Can you guess what they do there? Do you know how people get wrapped up in their occupation?

You go to a party. And you ask someone who they are. And they'll tell you, I'm a doctor. I'm an occupational therapist.

[15:38] I'm a dairy farmer. I mean, that's not who people are. But that's what people find their identity in. I mean, it's almost 100% of the time.

You ask somebody who they are. And they will answer with what they do. If you ask a man from Bethsaida who he is, 100% of the time he's going to say, I'm a fisherman.

It's not that these guys would argue, Oh, we're disciples of John. We can't follow a new master.

They have no chance in the world of being accepted as anyone's disciple.

No rabbi would take in this fisherman as one of his. So here we have Philip and Nathaniel.

Now, Nathaniel is an interesting guy. Most New Testament scholars, and I tend to agree with them, believe that this is actually Bartholomew.

[16:41] This is a second name for Bartholomew. He's a bit of a wise guy. Can anything good come out of Nazareth?

He's tied up in some sort of regional rivalry. We don't know what it is going on here. I know that from where I come from in northern Oswego County, we have these really dumb rivalries between hamlets with less than 600 people.

People say, Well, I am glad I did not come from Redfield. Or I'm glad I did not come from Richland. Or I'm glad I didn't come from Warwell. And for you guys, sophisticated Syracusans that you are,

you would drive and go and think, These places all look identically the same.

But for Nathaniel, Nazareth is like Catooine, a wretched hive of scum and villainy. But this is pretty rich.

Coming from a fish man that grew up in fish town. And Jesus answers him back with something that is clever and pretty funny.

[18:07] Nathaniel is the kind of guy that you never have to wonder what is going on in his head. He just says what's in there without any tact whatsoever. And Jesus calls him a true Israelite.

He's not pegging him down just to the country he was born in. He is actually comparing him to the man named Israel. Formally known as Jacob.

And what was Jacob's identity? He was a liar and a trickster. Someone who you could never take at his word. It was Jacob who famously deceived his brother Esau, his father Isaac, and his uncle Aban.

And perhaps making a joke in response to the Nazareth wisecrack, Jesus says, At last, the son of a trickster in whom there is no deceit.

But Jesus, how do you know me? I saw you before Philip called you under the fig tree.

[19:21] No mere man could have known that. And we can peg down, we see the moment Nathaniel enters into his discipleship.

Look at verse 49. His response? Rabbi Master, Son of God, King of Israel.

Is that all it takes to make you believe Nathaniel, the son of Jacob the trickster? You will see greater things yet.

You will see the heavens open up and the angels descend, ascend upon the son of man. There was a time in Jacob's life when he had been essentially cast out from the camp of his father.

Second or third scam you run on your family, they tend to not want to have more to do with you.

And before he made it to his next destination, the land of his uncle Abin, when as he slept with his head on a pillow of stone, the heavens opened up and a ladder came down and angels descended to the earth and ascended to heaven.

[20:49] And this lost, scared, and displaced man who thought his future was lost realized that the favor of God rested upon him.

Not for his name's sake, it was the sake of his grandfather Abraham. And he named that place Beth-El, meaning the house of God.

Jesus here is not predicting the transfiguration, as some say, because that can't be possible.

Nathaniel wasn't present at the transfiguration.

But what Jesus is announcing is his complete work. He is the house of God. He is the Beth-El.

He is the word become flesh. the place where heaven meets earth. He is the house of Jacob. And these five men have entered onto a new path.

[21:59] Now, sometimes as a preacher you struggle with the application of a passage. This one's pretty clear. You stand and look into the face of your God.

What are you going to do with him? The choice is to either follow him and dwell with him, or to run off into the darkness.

The changing of who people are is a required part of the call and can only be accomplished by Jesus. No one at the end of today's reading is left the same.

John is no longer the master rabbi. Andrew and the unknown disciples are no longer in the school of John. Peter doesn't even have the same name and is destined to a ministry that will change both the Jewish and the Gentile world.

Philip and Nathaniel were defined by their small town occupation and now their citizenship has a heavenly expectation.

[23:11] Who can stand before the Lamb of God and remain the same? Wherever Jesus is, lives are turned upside down. We're really at the beginning of looking at Christ's ministry of the disciples and are we going to find perfection there?

No. And there is no formula I can give you to get there. But the avenue to perfect discipleship is found in this.

In the words of Christ. Abide in me and I in you. My dear brothers and sisters, it is another sermon yet to come in this series.

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.