

January 15, 2017

TEXT: John 1:29–42

TITLE: Leadership Change

By the Rev. Patrice Fowler-Searcy

The next day he saw Jesus coming towards 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.’

*³²And 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 author of the Gospel of John tells us when John the Baptist pointed Jesus out to his disciples: Andrew and another unnamed disciple, upon seeing him, they sensed a shift in the atmosphere and realized a time to start over was at hand. And when the disciples heard John the Baptist say: “Look, here is the Lamb of God,” they realized it was time for a change in leadership, and they immediately followed Jesus. Now we presume the unnamed disciple was John, the one whom Jesus loved, because if we read a little further into this Gospel, we are told the unnamed disciple compels his brother, James to follow Jesus as well.

We might ask the question: What caused the two disciples who had joined themselves to John the Baptist, the one crying out in the wilderness, the one who testified that he was not the Messiah, Elijah or a prophet, but sent by God to witness and point to the light, the one who would be the savior of the world, to walk away from John’s leadership, their fishing profession and ultimately the life they held dear to follow Jesus and become faithful witnesses and continue the evangelistic move of God? Was it as, the word of God says: “you shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free?” (John 8:32)

It might be appropriate for us to ponder: what was or is the impetus behind us following Jesus? Perhaps, we were searching for something beyond worldly gain, material goods, or personal recognition. It may have been a desire to be in relationship with someone or something beyond what we can physically see, touch, or feel. Possibly it was a yearning to be an instrument in the healing move of God in a broken and fractured world; or maybe we finally became aware of the still, small, voice within us that beckoned and made us know that we are loved and known by God? Whatever, it is or was, at some point in our lives, we came to the realization that Jesus IS and because he is, we ARE. As the prophet Jeremiah said, "Before we were formed in our mothers' wombs, God knew us," and claimed us as God's own. Therefore, it was only a matter of time before we would decide that we could no longer conform to the ways of the world; we could no longer lean to our own feeble and sometimes misguided understanding; we could no longer be satisfied walking in darkness. It was only a matter of time before we too would seek a change in leadership!

This weekend we celebrate the birth of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., a man born into a long line of Baptist preachers. It was not unusual that he would choose the same vocation, or perhaps more appropriately, that vocation would choose him. However, even before he became fully aware of the call placed on his life to be a messenger crying into the darkness and wilderness of racism and hate, God destined him to be the embodiment of the civil rights movement.

Called to pastor the Dexter Street Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama, as Dr. King concluded his first year, he wrote in the annual report to his congregation, of the "superb" work of the Social and Political Action Committee: And I quote: "Through the work of this committee many persons have become registered voters and Dexter has led all other church[es] of Montgomery in contributions to the NAACP." King heaped accolades on all aspects of the church, noting that "the wonders that have come about at Dexter this year were not due so much to my leadership, but to the greatness of your follow-ship."

Brothers and sisters, in order to be a leader, there must be a follow-ship. Now please don't get it twisted and think that I'm talking about following a leader to the point of elevating them to the position of Messiah. There is only one anointed one. But follow-ship that is able and willing to answer the question that Jesus posed to John's disciples, "What are you looking for?" What are we looking for? Are we looking for the truth, or are we comfortable where we are?

John the Baptist ushered in the world of Jesus and modeled a ministry of truth telling for the first disciples and those disciples would begin their journey with Jesus with an invitation to come and see the truth themselves. The disciples eventually understood that faithful witness seeks and testifies to truth in the context of darkness.

Faithful witness and truth-telling is willingness, with God's help, to stand up and confront anyone and everything that shuns the light. Dr. King took the position that "faithful

witness confronts the evil deeds of groups that tolerate bigotry and deny dignity and justice to others; faithful witness confronts the evil deeds of governments that use military or clandestine methods to destabilize other nations; faithful witness confronts brutal policing tactics or policies that harm the poor and powerless who need food, housing and health care. Faithful witness confronts prison systems that are seen as good money-making investments, faithful witness confronts advocating for the right to own guns as more important than advocating for better schools. Faithful witness speaks truthfully to those who live in darkness, both the oppressed and the oppressor, the abuser and the abused and announces the coming of light.”

A few weeks ago, I visited the African-American Heritage Smithsonian Museum in Washington, DC, and had the opportunity to see the bus Rosa Parks was riding when she refused to give up her seat to a white man. On December 1, 1955, the very night of Rosa Park’s arrest, the head of the local NAACP, E.D. Nixon, decided it was time for a change in leadership and he enlisted the help the young, educated, charismatic pastor of the Dexter Street Baptist Church, Dr. King who Dr. King, who was elected president of the Birmingham NAACP and chosen to lead the now famous 381 day city-wide bus boycott. In his first speech as president to the NAACP members, Dr. King declared:

"We have no alternative but to protest. For many years we have shown an amazing patience. We have sometimes given our white brothers the feeling that we liked the way we were being treated. But we come here tonight to be saved from that **patience** that makes us **patient** with anything less than freedom and justice."

After what was one of the most contentious and divisive election in recent history, in a few days our country will have a change in leadership. As the people of God, we are called to stand up for the least, the lost and those who might soon be left behind. So this day, I implore you, in the words of Dr. King, “be saved from that patience that makes us patient with anything less than freedom and justice!” And be the followers of Jesus Christ! BE the voice that speaks truth to power. BE the voice crying out in the wilderness – do everything and anything you can to advocate for justice, truth, safety and peace; march and campaign for affordable healthcare, compassionate immigration policies, and for restorative justice to those who are incarcerated and returning home; speak up for equal education and housing opportunities, and stand for life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness for everyone and demand nothing less. This is our reasonable service unto God and to one another. And that is what Jesus meant when he said, “come and see.” Come and see the restoration of sight to the blind. Come and see the restoration of hearing to the deaf. Come and see freedom for those who are in bondage. Come and see wickedness in high places overturned. Come and see, peace and justice and light overcome darkness.

Amen.