

# SERMON WRITER

## RESOURCES FOR LECTIONARY PREACHING

To print this document, go to the upper left corner of the screen and click "File" and select "Print".

# The Second Sunday after the Epiphany

Year A

January 20, 2008

Volume 12, Number 5  
ISSN 1071-9962

[Title](#)

[Exegesis](#)

[More Sermons](#)

[Hymns & Hymn Story](#)

[Sermon in a Sentence](#)

[Children's Sermon](#)

[True Story](#)

[Upcoming Weeks](#)

[Scripture](#)

[Sermon](#)

[Thought Provokers](#)

[Bibliography](#)

**A THOUGHT ON PREACHING:** A good sermon leaves you wondering how the preacher knew so much about you. (Author unknown)

**TITLE:** I'm Gonna Let It Shine!

**SERMON IN A SENTENCE:** Let your little light shine for Jesus (just as John the Baptist did), and you will be surprised at how much God can make out of your life.

**SCRIPTURE:** John 1:29-42

## EXEGESIS:

### VERSES 19-51: THE CONTEXT

"The theme that binds together 1:19-51 is that of witness to Jesus.... Witness is a central theme of the Fourth Gospel as a whole.... So in the Fourth Gospel the whole story of Jesus is shot through with trial motifs; witnesses are called, witness is borne, and the testimony is constantly questioned and rejected by opponents of Jesus, till at length he undergoes a final trial. Through it all Jesus himself appears as the Witness to the revelation from God; he bears testimony to what he has seen and heard from the Father (3:32), and in support thereof he adduces the ultimate witness — that of the Father, who bore witness to Jesus through John, through the works he gave Jesus to do, and through the Scriptures of the OT (5:31-47)" (Beasley-Murray, 29).

The witness of John the Baptist is crucial to the beginning of Jesus' ministry. John's witness begins with the reference to "the testimony (Greek: *marturia* — testimony or witness) given by John" to priests and Levites who had been sent from Jerusalem to ask, "Who are you?" (1:19). John made it clear to them that he was not the Messiah, but was sent to "Make straight the way of the Lord" (1:20-23). Then, speaking of the one on whom the Spirit descended, John said, "And I myself have seen and have testified (Greek: *memartureka* — testified or witnessed) that this is the Son of God" (1:34).

Then John witnesses to his own disciples, saying of Jesus, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!" — with the result that the two disciples stop following John and start following Jesus (1:37). At that point, having accomplished his witnessing task, John fades from the picture. We see him only once more in this Gospel, when his disciples ask him about Jesus, who has become quite popular (3:26). John tells them, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (3:30).

It seems unfortunate that this lesson ends at verse 42. The lectionary deals with verses 43-51 in Year B, but those verses include elements that appear to belong with verses 29-42. For instance, the last verses of this lesson tell of Andrew bringing his brother, Simon, to Jesus, while verses 43-46 tell of Philip bringing Nathanael to Jesus.

Also, verses 29-42 bestow a number of titles on Jesus, developing a strong Christology. John the Baptist calls Jesus the Lamb of God (vv. 29, 36); a man who was before me (v. 30); the one on whom the Holy Spirit remained (v. 33); and the Son of God (v. 34). John's disciples call Jesus Rabbi (v. 38). Andrew calls him the Messiah (v. 41). Verses 43-51 continue to bestow titles. Nathanael calls Jesus Rabbi, Son of God, and King of Israel (v. 49). Jesus completes the Christology with his own declaration that he is the Son of Man (v. 51).

### VERSES 29-34: THE LAMB OF GOD

*29*The next day (John the Baptist) saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, *Here is the Lamb of God (Greek: ide ho amnos tou theou — Behold 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 (Greek: *houtos* — this one) is the Son of God."

**"The next day (John the Baptist) saw Jesus coming toward him"** (v. 29a). This Gospel opened with the Prologue (1:1-18), a lengthy theological statement about Jesus, who was with God in heaven, coming down to be born in the flesh. Then John the Baptist testified that he was not the Messiah (1:20), but had come to "Make straight the way of the Lord" (1:23). He also testified that one was coming who was so great that John was unworthy even to untie the thong of his sandal" (1:27). "The next day he saw Jesus coming" (v. 29).

This text helps to clarify the relationship between John the Baptist and Jesus. Even after John's death and Jesus' resurrection, John's reputation continued to draw disciples (Acts 18:25; 19:1-5). Although, at the writing of this Gospel, the Baptist has been dead for decades, the evangelist goes to great lengths to establish and re-establish that Jesus is the greater and the Baptist is the lesser.

- The Prologue says that John "was not the light, but he came to testify to the light" (1:8). John cries out, "This was he of whom

I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me' (1:15) — a clear reference to Jesus' pre-existence.

- When confronted by priests and Levites, John cries out, "I am not the Messiah" (1:20). He further declares that he is not Elijah, but is "the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord' " (1:23). He is not worthy to untie the thong of the sandal of the one who is coming (1:26-27).
- John declares that Jesus is "the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world" (v. 29).
- He establishes Jesus' superior authority by the Baptist's statement, "After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me" (v. 30).
- The Baptist says that his purpose in baptizing is "that (Jesus) might be revealed to Israel" (v. 31).
- He calls Jesus the Son of God (v. 34).
- He tells his own disciples that Jesus is the Lamb of God, with the result that the disciples leave the Baptist to follow Jesus (vv. 35-37).

**"Here is the Lamb of God"** (*ide ho amnos tou theou* — "Behold the Lamb of God") (v. 29b). "The crucial element is 'of God.' In accordance with biblical thought only God takes away or forgives sin" (Moloney, 58).

The phrase, Lamb of God, brings to mind:

- The Paschal (Passover) lamb, whose blood saved Israelites from death and paved the way for their deliverance from Egypt (Exodus 12). "One of the most important framing ideas in the Gospel of John is the Passover motif.... Passover...was a theological foundation stone for the entire Gospel" (Borchert). The Passover will soon be celebrated (2:13), so the Paschal Lamb would be in the evangelist's mind as he writes this. "In Judaism, the Passover lamb was not viewed as a sacrifice for sin, but the early church quickly reinterpreted Passover symbolism in the light of the eucharist (e.g., 1 Cor 5:7-8). Indeed, in the Fourth Gospel Jesus' crucifixion is linked to the slaughter of the paschal lamb. For example, the Fourth Evangelist links Jesus' unbroken legs at the crucifixion (19:33) with the Exod 12:46 teaching about the Passover lamb (19:36)" (O'Day, 528).
- The lamb provided by God to Abraham for sacrifice in place of Isaac (Genesis 22:8-13).
- The lamb from the Suffering Servant songs of Isaiah, which portrayed one who, by his sacrifice, will redeem his people. "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth" (Isa. 53:7). This certainly became an important part of the church's understanding of Christ, and "it may be that John the Baptist was the first to see it so" (Barclay, 64).
- The sheep that were sacrificed daily in the temple to redeem the people from their sins. John the Baptist's father was a priest (Luke 1:5), so these sacrifices would be very familiar to him.
- The lamb of Revelation 5 who "has conquered" (Revelation 5:5). The twenty-four elders will sing of this lamb, "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for God saints from every tribe and language and people and nation" (Revelation 5:9) — a tribute repeated by angels (Revelation 5:11-12) and "every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and in the sea, and all that is in them" (Revelation 5:13). This conquering lamb "crushes the evil powers of the earth. The picture of the apocalyptic, destroying lamb fits in every well with what we know of John the Baptist's eschatological preaching" (Brown, 59).
- Jeremiah's "gentle lamb led to the slaughter" (Jeremiah 11:19).

It is not necessary to choose one of these meanings. They merge in John's "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." "As so often in the Fourth Gospel, an old symbol is being used in a new way" (Moloney, 59).

**"who takes away the sin of the world!"** (v. 29c). "Sin" is singular, suggesting that the Lamb of God does not atone for sins piecemeal, but instead atones for "the totality of the world's sin" (Morris, 130). We find this idea reaffirmed in 1 John 2:2, which says: "He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world" (see also John 3:16).

**"After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me"** (v. 30). John the Baptist is several months older than Jesus (Luke 1:36), but Jesus ranks ahead of him because he was before him. This is a veiled reference to Jesus'

pre-existence, which the evangelist addresses in the Prologue (1:1-5).

**"I myself did not know him"** (v. 31a). John and Jesus are related (Luke 1:36) and have been acquainted from childhood, but only now does John recognize Jesus for who he really is. Only divine revelation makes this recognition possible. "The knowledge of Christ always comes as an occasion of revelation, as a divine gift" (Brueggemann, 106).

**"but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel"** (v. 31b). John's role is to witness to others concerning that which has been revealed to him. He began his ministry with an incomplete understanding of Jesus, and will be prevented by death from seeing the full scope of Jesus' ministry. Nevertheless, his ministry is crucial as he reveals Christ to Israel. Sweet asks, "Can we serve God by wandering around doing things we think are important but really don't understand?" and observes, "That happens to pastors all the time" (Sweet, 8). God often calls us to a pathway that is illuminated only inch by inch — if at all. When we walk with God into the darkness, God reveals great truths and makes great things happen.

**"And John testified, 'I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him'"** (v. 32). This Gospel does not recount the details of Jesus' baptism, but tells only of John's seeing "the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove" (v. 32).

It is significant that the Spirit remains (*meno*) on Jesus (v. 32). This verb, *meno*, occurs frequently in this Gospel, and is also translated abide (15:1-11). It describes a relationship that is deep and abiding rather than trivial or passing. Jesus has a deep and abiding relationship with the Spirit, and gives the disciples that kind of relationship with the Spirit (20:22).

**"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'"** (v. 33). John acknowledges once again (see v. 31) that he did not truly understand Jesus' unique identity until he witnessed the Spirit descending on Jesus at his baptism.

This verse contrasts John, who baptizes only with water, with Jesus, who baptizes with the Holy Spirit. "Baptism with water had essentially a negative significance: it is a cleansing from. But baptism with the Spirit is positive. It is the bestowal of new life in God" (Morris, 134).

**"I myself have seen and have testified"** (Greek: *memartureka* — testified or witnessed) (v. 34a). To serve as a true witness, one must have seen or experienced that of which he or she testifies. John can serve as a true witness, because he has seen the Spirit descend on Jesus and has heard the voice from heaven.

**"that this (*houtos* — this one) is the Son of God"** (v. 34b). The New Testament includes many references to Jesus as the Son of God (Matthew 4:3, 6; 8:29; 14:33; 16:16; 26:63; 27:40, etc.). In at least two instances, his status as Son of God is linked with his status as Messiah (Matthew 16:16; John 11:27). On one occasion, Jesus refers to himself as God's Son (John 10:36), and he often addresses God as Father or speaks of God as his Father (Matthew 11:25-26; 12:10; 15:13; 16:17, 27; 18:10, 19, 35; 24:36; 25:34; 26:39, 42, 53, etc.).

Jesus taught his disciples to think of God as their Father as well (Matthew 5:16, 45, 48; 6:1, 4, 6, 8-9, 14-15, 18, 26, 32; 7:11; 10:20, 29; 13:43; etc.), but the title, Son of God, clearly designates Jesus as the unique Son of the Father who enjoys a relationship with the Father that goes beyond the relationship that his disciples can experience (John 1:18; 3:35; 5:19-27; 6:40; 12:49).

## **VERSES 35-42: THE TWO DISCIPLES FOLLOWED JESUS**

**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?* (Greek: *meneis* — from *meno*) **39**He said to them, *Come and see.* They came and saw where he was staying (Greek: *menei* — from *meno*), and they remained (Greek: *emeinan* — from *meno*) 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 next day John again was standing with two of his disciples"** (v. 35). John continues his witness to Jesus. In this case, he witnesses to two of his own disciples, who respond by leaving John and following Jesus. John evidences "quite the opposite

pattern from the usual human tendency to be an empire builder. Therefore he provides a genuine model of what it means to be a minister or servant of God" (Borchet).

**"and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, 'Look, here is the Lamb of God!'"** (v. 36). "John's *private* testimony to two of his disciples concerning 'God's lamb' in the present passage coheres closely with his earlier *public* declaration" (Kostenberger, 72). John's willingness to witness to his own disciples concerning Jesus, surely understanding that his testimony might cause his disciples to abandon him for Jesus, is a mark of John's faithfulness to his calling.

**"The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus"** (v. 37). In the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus calls the disciples away from their fishing boats to follow him (Matthew 4:18-22). In the Fourth Gospel, they come to Jesus as the result of John's witness rather than in response to Jesus' call. Instead of leaving their boats, they leave their apprenticeship to John.

Note the pattern of witnessing that occurs in these verses. John the Baptist witnesses to two of his disciples concerning Jesus. One of these disciples, Andrew, witnesses to his brother, Simon Peter, who becomes a key figure in the Gospel story. The ripples move ever outward, and only God can predict how far they will reach.

**"What are you looking for?"** (v. 38a). When Jesus asks this question, the two disciples respond by asking where he is staying. A rabbi would have a place used for teaching disciples, and their question could indicate a desire to go to that place for instruction. However, the word translated "staying" is the same *meno* that we encountered earlier (v. 32) — a word used often in this Gospel to describe relationships. Their question may be less about Jesus' lodging arrangements than with the substance of his being — Who are you? — Where do you stand? — What are you about?

**"They said to him, 'Rabbi' (which translated means Teacher), 'where are you staying?'"** (*meneis* — from *meno*) (v. 38b). This Greek verb, *meno*, which is repeated three times in verses 38-39, has special meaning in this Gospel. Jesus says, "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide (*menei*) in me, and I in them" (John 6:56) — and "Abide (*meinate*) in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides (*mene*) in the vine, neither can you unless you abide (*menete*) in me" (John 15:4) — and "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide (*meinate*) in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide (*meneite*) in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide (*meno*) in his love" (John 15:9-10).

Abiding (staying with, remaining with) Jesus, then, clearly has deeply spiritual significance.

**"Come and see"** (v. 39a). This is their call to discipleship — and Jesus' first words in this Gospel.

**"They came and saw where he was staying (*menei* — from *meno*), and they remained (*emeinan* — from *meno*) with him that day"** (v. 39b). See the comments on verse 38b concerning the word *meno*.

**"It was about four o'clock in the afternoon"** (v. 39c). The comment about the time of day is interesting. Literally, it was about the tenth hour. Measured from the beginning of the Jewish day at sunrise (approx. six a.m.), this would be four o'clock in the afternoon, which is how the NRSV translates it. Why mention such an inconsequential detail? Perhaps it is to explain the disciples' decision to remain with Jesus — a superficial explanation of a profound decision. When we have a truly life-changing experience, we remember and report such details (Barclay, 71).

**"One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother"** (v. 40). The way this verse is phrased makes it clear that the author expects his readers to know who Simon Peter is. It is also clear that Andrew is less well known, and the readers might not know that he is Peter's brother.

Andrew **"first found his brother Simon and said to him, 'We have found the Messiah' (which is translated Anointed). He brought Simon to Jesus"** (vv. 41-42). Andrew has no grand vision. There is no record of him establishing a mission in a foreign land or preaching in synagogues. He goes only to his brother, but that outreach will have profound consequences — "perhaps...as great a service to the Church as ever any man did" (William Temple, quoted in Morris, 140). Evangelism often begins with those whom we know best — even those within our own family (Gossip, 486).

"Andrew... has no prominence in the Gospels. But when we do glimpse him, he is always doing the same thing, bringing others to Christ; and through them at second hand effecting mighty things for Christ, which but for him would not have been done at all" (Gossip, 487). Andrew does this on three occasions, this being the first. Later, he will bring a boy with loaves and fishes to Jesus (6:8-9). Finally, he will bring a group of Greeks (12:20-22).

"You can accomplish anything if you don't care who gets the credit." Andrew bears evidence of the truth of that old saying. He never achieves prominence in the Gospels, but he uses his unique gift of inviting to great effect. From the very beginning, Jesus gathered around him the most ordinary people. People like Andrew, ordinary people who possess only ordinary gifts, still do

most of Christ's work today. If only highly talented people responded to Christ's call, the church would be stunted and crippled.

**"We have found the Messiah' (Hebrew: *Messias*) (which is translated Anointed)" (Greek: *Christos*) (v. 41).** In this one verse we find both the Hebrew *Messias* and the Greek *Christos*, both of which mean "anointed." This and 4:25 are the only two places where the word *Messias* is found in the New Testament, and both of these verses also include the word *Christos*.

Anointing with oil was used for various purposes (healing, burial, expressing grief or joy). Most especially, it was used to designate a person for a significant role. In the Old Testament, prophets were anointed (1 Kings 19:16). Priests were anointed (Exodus 40:13-15). Kings were anointed (1 Samuel 10:1; 16:3, 12-13; 2 Samuel 23:1; 1 Kings 1:39).

The New Testament speaks of Jesus as anointed (John 20:31; Acts 5:42; Hebrews 1:9, etc.). His anointing set him apart for his unique role as prophet, priest, and king.

**"You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas' (which is translated Peter)" (v. 42).** This kind of name change has precedents in the Old Testament. God told Abram, "No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations" (Genesis 17:5). God told Jacob, "You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed" (Genesis 32:28). Such name changes indicate the beginning of a new life — a new purpose — a new relationship with God.

Cephas is the Aramaic word for rock and Peter is the Greek word for rock. Jesus sees rock-like possibilities in Peter that will not be realized for quite some time. For now Peter is spontaneous instead of rock-like. In his enthusiasm, he will walk on water toward Jesus, only to falter as soon as he realizes what he is doing (Matthew 14:28-30). In the heat of anger, he will cut off the ear of one of the men who come to seize Jesus (John 18:10). He will swear everlasting fealty to Jesus, but will deny him three times (Matthew 26). Only after the resurrection will Peter begin to resemble the rock that Jesus saw in him so much earlier. There are possibilities like this in each of us. If we follow Christ, he will bring those possibilities to the surface for us just as he did for Peter.

"With the transfer of these disciples to the new teacher Jesus thus achieved, John the Baptist slips away" (Sloyan, 24). He has succeeded in his witness to Jesus. He will re-appear briefly in chapter 3 only to re-affirm that he must decrease while Jesus must increase (3:30).

### **CHILDREN'S SERMON: Do You Recognize Me?**

By Lois Parker Edstrom

Picture of dove available at:

<http://picturethis.pnl.gov/PictureT.nsf/All/6B5LZR?opendocument>

We recognize people in many ways. Our family members are easy to recognize. We are familiar with their faces and certain items of clothes that they wear. We recognize the way they comb their hair, the way they walk and motion with their hands, the way their voice sounds. People we feel close to may even have a distinctive fragrance, like special cologne, or the smells that come from cooking or working in the garden.

Sometimes we are given clues that help us recognize people who are not familiar to us. These clues may tell us something about who a particular person is or what he or she does.

If you see a young person carrying a backpack near a school there is a pretty good chance that person is a student.

You can recognize a fireman or a policeman by the uniform he or she wears.

A man or woman with a stethoscope around the neck is likely to be a doctor or a nurse.

A person carrying a musical instrument is probably a musician.

Can you think of other ways you recognize people?

In the Bible John the Baptist tells us how he was able to recognize Jesus as the Son of God. John said, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him."

John goes on to say that he had been told by God that "...He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit."

And again John says, "...I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God."

God sent a sign, gave the world a clue so Jesus could be recognized as the Son of God. This sign, this clue that first came in the form of a dove, is the Holy Spirit. It is the part of God that lives in you and teaches you to recognize what is true. It is that quiet knowing inside of you that helps you make good choices and leads you to recognize Jesus as the Son of God.

**SERMON:** [\(Top of page\)](#)

(NOTE TO THE PREACHER: This is a wonderful children's song, beloved by generations. Kids love it. Old people love it. If possible, start your sermon by singing the song and doing the motions (enthusiastically, of course). Or have someone lead the congregation in singing it. Consider printing the words on a half sheet of paper to insert in the bulletin.)

This little light of mine (hold up index finger), I'm gonna let it shine.  
This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine,  
let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.

Won't let Satan blow it out (blow on finger).  
I'm gonna let it shine.  
Won't let Satan blow it out (blow on finger).  
I'm gonna let it shine, let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.

Hide it under a bushel (Cup finger over hand) - NO! (Remove hand).  
I'm gonna let it shine.  
Hide it under a bushel (Cup finger over hand) - NO! (Remove hand).  
I'm gonna let it shine, Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.

When I Googled "This Little Light of Mine," I was astonished to find two video clips on YouTube of Bruce Springsteen singing that song. If you can stand a few minutes of pure fun, watch those videos — two concerts — two versions:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lgUtOIPsgAU>  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rTebgVrHEVM&NR=1>

I also found one by King Louis Narcisse leading an African-American congregation in singing that song. That was fun too!

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MLJ3mnKspiY>

"This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine." That comes from the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus said:

"You are the light of the world.  
A city built on a hill cannot be hid.  
No one after lighting a lamp  
puts it under the bushel basket,  
but on the lampstand,  
and it gives light to all in the house" (Matthew 5:14-15).

So we sing, "This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine."

I can remember singing that song as a child. It was FUN to sing! It was FUN to do the motions! It was FUN to shout NO! and not get into trouble for it.

Even as a child, I had some idea what "I'm gonna let it shine" meant. I understood that I was pledging to let my light shine for Jesus. I wasn't sure how I could do that — or even IF I could do that — but I knew it was a promise — and I wanted to keep the promise!

"I'm gonna let it shine." Are you letting your little light shine for Jesus? Lots of people in this congregation ARE letting their lights shine. Some of you have public roles, like the organist and choir director and youth director — but many of you shine

your lights in quieter ways. Some of you teach Sunday school or sing in the choir. Some of you serve as ushers or liturgists. Some serve on committees. Some invite friends and neighbors to come to church with them. Some give generously to support Help House or hurricane relief. Some volunteer to drive young people to their events. Some lead Bible studies. Some just have a kind word and a smile for everyone they meet.

Some of you do several of those things — many of those things. I have heard it said that in most churches twenty percent of the people do eighty percent of the work. That is probably true. When it comes to letting their light shine for Jesus, some people are like a thousand-watt light bulb. They shine their light so brightly that they light many different corners. Their work brightens all our lives.

I have always wondered what it would be like if we could have thirty percent of the people involved like that — or forty percent — or a hundred percent. After all, every Christian ought to be letting his or her light shine for Jesus in some way.

John the Baptist was not even a Christian, but he let his light shine. God had NOT called John to be one of Jesus' disciples, but he HAD called John to point others to Jesus. That's what we see John doing in our Gospel lesson today.

To understand what John was doing, we need to know a little about him. John was a prophet — the first prophet Israel had known for 400 years. People flocked after him. Instead of setting up a tent at the edge of a city, John went to the desert to preach — and people came by the thousands to hear him. He had many disciples. He was like a religious rock star.

But one day John was standing with two of his disciples when he saw Jesus walking by. John said to his two disciples, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!" — at which John's two disciples left him — and began to follow Jesus.

John was letting his little light shine — and it cost him! In this case, it cost him two disciples. John must have grieved to see them go, because they were his disciples and they were his friends. But we don't get any indication that John was disappointed at their leaving or that he was jealous of Jesus. Whenever we hear about John, he is telling everyone how wonderful Jesus is. John knew that God had sent him to prepare the way for Jesus, and he was happy to do that.

John! John the Baptist! Letting his little light shine!

Two of John's disciples left him and began to follow Jesus. One of the disciples was Andrew, and we don't even know the other disciple's name. We don't know much about Andrew either. Andrew is one of Jesus' disciples who mostly stands in the background.

BUT quiet Andrew did one thing that turned out well. He went to get his brother, Simon Peter, and said, "We have found the Messiah!" He brought Peter to Jesus, and Peter became the leader of Jesus' disciples.

Andrew! Letting his little light shine! Andrew! Bringing his brother to Jesus!

That's the way it works, you see! One Christian lets his or her little light shine, and that light changes another person's life. Then that person lets his or her light shine, and that light changes someone else's life.

It is like throwing a stone in a lake and watching the ripples. How far do the ripples go? How many lives do they touch? It is not possible to say. God can keep the ripples going for a very long time.

I am reminded of Mordecai Ham. Mordecai was an evangelist. In 1934, he conducted a revival meeting in Charlotte, North Carolina. One of the people who came forward was a tall, gangly boy who had just turned sixteen. I don't know how many other people came forward. I don't know whether Mordecai felt that he had conducted a successful revival. I doubt seriously that he remembered that sixteen year old boy very long. But that boy was Billy Graham, who took the light that Mordecai Ham had given him and held it aloft for everyone to see.

When we let our little light shine, how far does it shine? How much good does it do? Does it change lives? Does it help people? Only God knows! But God is faithful. If we go through life letting our light shine for Jesus, we can be sure that God will make something of it. We won't know the full effects during our lifetime. But just wait until we get to heaven. I believe that God will reveal to us wonders that we never imagined. I believe that God will show us that our lives really counted for something — if we were letting our little light shine.

So what do we have to do to let our little light shine? That depends on what God calls us to do. God calls some of us to be preachers— and others to be Sunday school teachers — and others to be choir leaders or choir members — and others to work with youth. But, most of all, God calls us to be Christians — people who try to live as Jesus would have us live. That, in itself, can be a powerful witness. Philip Yancey, the Christian author, asks:

"What would happen in the national consensus  
if these nine words came to mind  
when you said the word, 'Christian':  
love, joy peace,  
patience, kindness, goodness,  
faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control?"

Those are the nine things that the Apostle Paul listed as the fruits of the Spirit in his letter to the Galatian church (Galatians 5:22-23):

"Love, joy peace,  
patience, kindness, goodness,  
faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control?"

Not all of us are called to be preachers. Not all of us are called to be Sunday school teachers. Not all of us are called to be choir directors. But ALL of us — ALL of us — are called to bear the fruits of the Spirit. What could God do with your life if the people who know you best would think of you as a person filled with:

"Love, joy peace,  
patience, kindness, goodness,  
faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control?"

Today, I would like to call you to do some soul-searching. God wants to make something out of your life. God does NOT want you to live a life of drudgery. God does NOT want you to go through life just putting one foot in front of the other. God wants you live a joyful, productive life. God wants you to be a light shining in the darkness — helping others who are trying to find their way. At the end of the day, God wants you to feel that it was important that you were alive. At the end of your life, God wants to greet you and show you all wonderful things that your life accomplished — with God's help — when you let your little light shine.

So what can you do?

- The first thing is to pray — asking God to reveal what he has in mind for your life.
- The second thing is to listen — to hear God when he speaks.
- And then, when God shows you something that needs doing, do it. When God shows you someone who needs helping, help them. When God shows you a problem, start looking for a solution.

With God's help, you will be astonished at how important your life can be — if you just let your little light shine.

**MORE SERMONS ON THIS TEXT:** You might also find the following sermons helpful.

Dr. Randy L. Hyde, "Confessions of an Amateur Preacher"

<http://www.lectionary.org/Sermons/Hyde/John/John%2001.29-42,%20Confessions.htm>

Rev. Billy D. Strayhorn, "Called and Chosen"

<http://www.lectionary.org/Sermons/Strayhorn/John/John%2001.29-42%20CalledChosen.htm>

**TRUE STORY:**

See the Mordecai Ham story in the sermon above.

**THOUGHT PROVOKERS:** ([Top of page](#))

What would happen in the national consensus

if these nine words came to mind when you said the word "Christian":

love, joy, peace,  
patience, kindness, goodness,  
faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control?

• Philip Yancey, I Was Just Wondering

\* \* \* \* \*

Had the doctrines of Jesus been preached always  
as pure as they came from his lips,  
the whole civilized world would now have been Christian.

• Thomas Jefferson

\* \* \* \* \*

There is nothing so contagious as holiness,  
nothing more pervasive than Prayer.  
This is precisely what the traditional Church means by evangelism  
and what distinguishes from recruitment.

• Martin Thornton

\* \* \* \* \*

It would scarcely be necessary to expound doctrine  
if our lives were radiant enough.  
If we behaved like true Christians,  
there would be no pagans.

• Pope John XXIII

\* \* \* \* \*

You are writing a Gospel,  
A chapter each day,  
By the deeds that you do,  
And the words that you say.

Men read what you write,  
If it's false or it's true.  
Now what is the Gospel  
According to you?

\* \* \* \* \*

**HYMNS:**

HYMNALS

- Baptist Hymnal (BH)
- Chalice Hymnal (CH)
- Collegeville Hymnal (CO)
- Common Praise (CP)
- Evangelical Lutheran Worship (ELW)
- Gather Comprehensive (GC)
- JourneySongs (JS)
- Lutheran Book of Worship (LBW)
- Lutheran Service Book (LSB)

Lutheran Worship (LW)  
Presbyterian Hymnal (PH)  
The Faith We Sing (TFWS)  
The Hymnal 1982 (TH)  
The New Century Hymnal (TNCH)  
United Methodist Hymnal (UMH)  
Voices United (VU)  
With One Voice (WOV)  
Wonder Love and Praise (WLP)  
Worship & Rejoice (WR)

#### GATHERING:

I Want Jesus to Walk With Me (BH #465; CH #627; CP #512; ELW #325; PH #363; TNCH #490; UMH #521; WLP #805; WOV #660; WR #506)

O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing (BH #206, 216; CH #5; CP #306; ELW #886; LBW #559; PH #466; TH #493; TNCH #42; UMH #57; VU #326; WR #96)

#### PROCLAIMING:

Christ, Whose Glory Fills the Skies (CO #424; CP #5; ELW #553; LBW #265; LSB #873; LW #480; PH #462, 463; TH #6, 7; UMH #173; VU #336; WR #91)

Jesus, Priceless Treasure (ELW #775; LBW #457, 458; LSB #743; LW #270; PH #365; TNCH #480; UMH #532; VU #667; WR #431)

Lead Me, Lord (CH #593; JS #655; UMH #473)

My Faith Looks Up to Thee (BH #416; CH #576; CP #551; ELW #759; LBW #479; LSB #702; LW #378; PH #383; TH #691; UMH #452; VU #663; WR #419)

O Love, How Deep, How Broad, How High (CP #628; ELW #322; LBW #88; LSB #544; LW #275; PH #83; TH #448, 449; TNCH #209; UMH #267; VU #348)

Songs of Thankfulness and Praise (CO #231; CP #162; ELW #310; GC #376; JS #223; LBW #90; LSB #394; LW #88; TH #135; VU #101; WR #243)

Also known as Sing of God Made Manifest

Spirit of the Living God (BH #244; CH #259; CP #647; JS #330; PH #322; TNCH #283; UMH #393; VU #376; WR #492)

Spirit Song (CH #352; UMH #347)

Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus (BH #320; UMH #349; WR #472)

#### SENDING:

Here I Am, Lord (CH #452; ELW #574; GC #686; JS #528; PH #525; UMH #593; VU #509; WLP #812; WOV #752; WR #559)

Just as I Am, Without One Plea (BH #303 & #307; CH #339; CP #615; ELW #592; LBW #296; LSB #570; LW #359; PH #370; TH #693; TNCH #207; UMH #357; VU #508; WR #354)

Lead Me, Guide Me (CH #553; ELW #768; GC #574; LSB #721; TFWS #2214; WLP #756; WR #498)

Lead On, O King Eternal (BH #621; CH #632; ELW #805; LBW #495; PH #447-448; TH #555; TNCH #573; UMH #580; VU

#421; WR #508)

Also known as "Lead On, O Cloud of Presence"

Spirit of God, Descend Upon My Heart (BH #245; CH #265; ELW #800; LBW #486; PH #326; TNCH #290; UMH #500; VU #378, 877; WR #132)

When Jesus Came to Jordan (ELW #305; PH #72; TH #139; UMH #252; WOV #647; WR #241)

### **HYMN STORY:** Just As I Am

Are you ever frustrated that you can't do more for Jesus? That you don't have anything special to offer?

Charlotte Elliott, the author of the hymn, "Just as I Am," certainly felt that way. She had been a brilliant and vivacious woman until an illness left her an invalid. Her situation left her quite depressed. She felt that she no longer had anything to offer — nothing to give.

But a pastor, Dr. Caesar Malan, came to visit her. Noting her despair, he encouraged her to give Christ her life — to come to Christ just as she was. That comment started a turnaround for her. While she remained an invalid, she began to search for ways to make her life meaningful.

And Dr. Malan's words stayed with her — "Come to Christ just as you are." Several years later, she wrote this hymn, which has become a favorite around the world. While she wrote more than a hundred hymns, this one in particular has affected more lives than she ever could have imagined.

So if you ever wonder what you can do to make your life meaningful, just put it in Christ's hands and go where he leads. Christ has a way of using ordinary people to do extraordinary things.

### **SCRIPTURES FOR UPCOMING WEEKS:** ([Top of page](#))

We follow the Revised Common Lectionary (RCL) and use Sunday texts only. When possible, we use supplementary mailings to accommodate denominational differences.

NOTE: For the Old Testament readings, I will provide only the exegesis.

Jan 27	Epiphany 3A	Matt. 4:12-23 AND Isaiah 9:1-4
Feb 3	Transfiguration	Matt. 17:1-9
Feb 10	Lent 1A	Matt. 4:1-11 AND Rom. 5:12-19 AND Gen. 2:15-17; 3:1-7
Feb 17	Lent 2A	John 3:1-17 AND Rom. 4:1-5, 13-17 AND Gen. 12:1-4

• Scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA. All rights reserved. Used by permission

### **BIBLIOGRAPHY:**

Abbey, Merrill R. and Edwards, O.C., *Proclamation: Epiphany, Series A* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974)

Barclay, William, *The Daily Study Bible*, "The Gospel of John," Vol. 1 (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1955)

Beasley-Murray, George R., *Word Biblical Commentary: John* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999)

Bergent, Dianne and Fragomeni, Richard, *Preaching the New Lectionary, Year A* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2001)

Borchet, Gerald L., *New American Commentary: John 1-11*, Vol. 25A (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1996)

Brown, Raymond, *The Anchor Bible: The Gospel According to John I-XII* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1966)

Bruce, F. F., *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1983)

Brueggemann, Walter; Cousar, Charles B.; Gaventa, Beverly R. and Newsome, James D., *Texts for Preaching: A Lectionary Commentary Based on the NRSV—Year A* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995)

Burgess, Joseph A. and Winn, Albert C., *Proclamation 2: Epiphany, Series A* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980)

Campbell, Charles L., in Van Harn, Roger (ed.), *The Lectionary Commentary: Theological Exegesis for Sunday's Text. The Third Readings: The Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001)

Carson, D. A., *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991)

Craddock, Fred R.; Hayes, John H.; Holladay, Carl R.; and Tucker, Gene M., *Preaching Through the Christian Year A* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1992)

Gossip, Arthur John and Howard, Wilbert F., *The Interpreter's Bible*, Volume 8 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1952)

Hedahl, Susan B., *Proclamation 6: Epiphany, Series A* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press)

Kostenberger, Andreas J., *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: John* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004)

Lincoln, Andrew T., *Black's New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to John* (London: Continuum, 2005)

Moloney, Francis J., *Sacra Pagina: The Gospel of John*, Vol. 4 (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1998)

Morris, Leon, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Gospel According to John (Revised)* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995)

O'Day, Gail R., *The New Interpreter's Bible*, Volume IX (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995)

Ridderbos, Herman (translated by John Vriend), *The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997)

Sloyan, Gerald, "John," *Interpretation* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988)

Smith, D. Moody, Jr., *Abingdon New Testament Commentaries: John* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999)

Sweet, Leonard, "Used by the Lord," *Homiletics*, Jan. 14, 1990

Williamson, Lamar, Jr., *Preaching the Gospel of John: Proclaiming the Living Word* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004)

[\(Top of Page\)](#)

[www.sermonwriter.com](http://www.sermonwriter.com)

[www.lectionary.org](http://www.lectionary.org)

We welcome your feedback! [dick@sermonwriter.com](mailto:dick@sermonwriter.com)

Copyright 2008, Richard Niell Donovan

