



SERMONS THAT WORK

Epiphany 2 (A)

Testimony

[RCL]: Isaiah 49:1-7; Psalm 40:1-12; 1 Corinthians 1:1-9; John 1:29-42

Don't you find it remarkable that we know anything at all? If you think about it, we don't know much of anything unless we have been taught it by another person. Engaging in a website or a film or a book privately is being taught by another person; the website and that film and book were made by other people. Even the learning that occurs in raw nature is colored by our interactions with other people; when you look at a tree, you know it's called a tree because you learned that word from *someone*.

Life and learning then are really all about referral: one person referring information to another person.

Certainly, each of us can think of a dozen stories of childhood and onward that describe a single individual showing how something operates, telling us information, relating to us a deeper understanding of how the universe works.

All of us have these teachers, whether officially or not. All of us have these teachers. Who are yours? Who has taught you about life, the universe, and everything? Perhaps it was a schoolteacher, or a parent, or a grandparent. Maybe it was a boss or a spouse. Or a dog. Probably not a cat, they aren't good for much – just kidding, a lot can be learned from cats, mostly how not to care one whit about something when it would not be an improvement over silence and sleep. Who has been that person that referred you to a larger life, showed you that life is richer than you thought?

In today's Gospel passage, we see how this teaching, this act of referral to a larger life, works. The passage opens with John the Baptist sort of hanging out. Along comes Jesus. Then the proclamation that Jesus is the Lamb of God leaps out of his mouth. When John describes Jesus as the Lamb of God, he means that, in the spiritual tradition of Jesus and John and those who were gathered, Jesus is the active agent in a healing act between God and creation. Jesus is, *is*, the restored relationship between God and people. But that proclamation began with John and, as the text says, is his testimony. John is testifying to what God has already made known to him. Now, a lot of us Episcopalians get nervous about the word "testify" because, in other Christian groups, a testimony is a once and for all occasion that many of us can't relate to. For us, instead, we generally see God in glimpses, and our growth toward Christ is slow but sure. One great thing about the notion of testimony, though, is that it is predicated on both a testimony *about* something, namely

God, but also *to* something, namely whoever wants to hear about it. John, then, is testifying to those around him. And what do they do in response to that testimony? They leave John and follow Jesus.

It's then that we learn that one of John's disciples is Andrew; we know Andrew will become one of Jesus' disciples. After Andrew spends time with Jesus, he goes to his brother Simon Peter and refers him to Jesus. Here is that whole notion of learning from another; Andrew learns about Jesus from John, and then, in turn, teaches Peter about Jesus and on and on and on it went until just this very second, right here in this place. The Church and all of Christian history, witness, and theology is a chain of referral to Jesus that began with John and Andrew and ends right now in your ears, your head, and your heart.

It could end you know.

If no Christian went public, so to speak, if no Christian testified to Jesus, the Church would utterly evaporate. The gospel would still exist, of course, but only in the abstract. The gospel would then be the proverbial falling tree in the woods with no one to hear it fall. If the gospel is not proclaimed, is it the gospel? God is so committed to non-violence that God will not force it on us. The gospel requires – *requires* – people to proclaim and live it. If we don't, society and culture will just swallow it up, because as we know, nature abhors a vacuum. If we do not proclaim that God is love and, through Jesus Christ, has broken every bond and boundary and empowered us to do the same, well, the culture will come in and teach us how to get and get and get and how to use people as things.

The thing is: how are you testifying to Jesus? How are you, like Andrew or any of your teachers, referring Jesus to others? You don't have to have some great flash-of-light epiphany, but you should have something, *some* sense of how Christ is growing in you, or more commonly, how Christ is introducing various crises to how we think and live. These crises help us separate the wheat from the chaff of what matters to God.

We may not be too articulate on this point of testimony to Jesus. Many may say, "Well, of course I follow Jesus, but I don't want to be rude or shove this life down anyone's throat." It is good to be sensitive to that, but we must ask whether our manners are what we use to cover our courage.

Testimony means simply: what does it matter to your life – your buying, your selling, your loving, your viewing, your praying, your driving – that you have been baptized and follow Jesus? Begin to answer that, and then start bringing Jesus up as the reason why you act the way you act.

How is your testimony to Jesus? Start small and simply. If you are not articulate in testifying to Jesus, start small. If you have children, start with them, teach them that your family is loving and courageous because Jesus invites us into that kind of life. Find a trusted friend and say, "You know, I think I actually believe this whole Jesus thing." Once you begin saying it, once you begin referring Jesus, it gets easier and you become braver. Without testimony, the gospel dries up, and when that happens, other ways of life will come in – ways of life that are manifestly *not* ways to life.

Perhaps you simply don't have a testimony to Jesus; you have nothing to which you can yet refer. To you, I ask you to commit to a season of prayer, asking Jesus to work more powerfully and explicitly in your life. This is the season of Epiphany, after all. Maybe pray this prayer for a month and see what happens, then report back so we can get your testimony. If you allow God into your life, he will come.

Friends, we need your testimony now more than ever. Be like John, be like Andrew, be like the uncountable cloud of witnesses to God's gospel of love, justice, peace, and presence. Show us all in your words and life that Jesus is the Lamb of God who has taken away the sin of the world. Amen.

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