**January 14th 2024 Second Sunday after Epiphany**

**Text: John 1:35-41** 0698

**Theme: Directional Preaching.**

May God our Father grant unto each of you grace through the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world. Amen. Dear Christians: Point A to point B. Whenever we leave our houses, whenever we move to begin a task, whenever we go on a long road-trip, we begin at a starting point and move forward to reach a specific destination. Rarely will men ever depart from where they are at without a certain destination in mind. Along the way during these trips, no matter how long the trip, there are certain signs or helpful people showing us the way. These signs are invaluable, especially when driving from one place to another, or in an airport, when looking for a restroom, navigating a smart phone and the like. In nearly every aspect of our lives we are constantly following a sign or person telling us which direction should be taken, prompts are given, flashing lights pierce our eyes, billboards tell of restaurants, and signs all point us in the right direction.

It is no different with our spiritual lives, in fact, it is here that we need more direction than any other place. We are entirely unable to find our way, for we are spiritually blind, our understanding is darkened and we grope about, as we are by nature, without a clue of which direction is the right direction. In addition, as Christians, we are often frustrated by the seeming lack of results to whatever preaching we may do to those who are lost, or to those who are erring. The apostle Paul once said: *“This one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” (Phil. 3:13)* Men are, by nature, without direction spiritually, and it is described often in Scripture that men run to and fro in the earth, and this is less a description of men’s travels through the earth and more a description of men’s spiritual state, they run to this and they run to that, they run here and there, never knowing which direction is the right direction. On the one hand they hear a Muslim imam directing them to allah and his prophet Mohammed. On the other hand they hear the pope directing men to himself, to the saints, and to Mary. Over there a Baptist preacher directing them to “decide” for Christ, over here a Jew directing them to reject Jesus of Nazareth; here is Buddha, there is Darwin; here is the god of self, there is the god of mother nature. In this type of chaos men run from one to the next, mingling one with another, each devising his own version, yet none receiving any real direction. For many poor people religion is something like a buffet, where they take a little of this and a little of that thinking that, somewhere in this amalgamation of religion, they might stumble onto salvation. Yet is this the sort of direction that Paul speaks of? Was he pressing forward toward an unknown mark? And if the mark is certain, is the way obscure? This has been one of the greatest accomplishments of Satan, especially today placing side by side with the true directions, all sorts of mis-directions. He has erected billboard after billboard telling the traveler of the many directions that can be taken, and he dresses it up with the idea that they all lead to the same place, to the place that Paul spoke of. Satan is half right. All these billboards that he has set up lead to the same place, just not the place that Paul speaks of, they rather lead to damnation. It is in a world such as this that there is a great need for directional preaching. Preaching which does not compromise or equalize, but points the Way Paul speaks of. It is this preaching which will be the subject of our study today, as taught in our text, which is found in the first chapter of the Gospel according to John beginning at verse thirty five.

**Quote text here.**

Let us pray, O almighty Lord, Thou Lamb of God, Thou Savior of our souls, we thank Thee for the gift of faith which Thou didst grant unto each of us, by which we have been placed on the Way, and given direction to the mark of the prize of the high calling in Thee. We implore Thee to help us stay in our course and be turned neither to the right hand nor to the left, but be led, by Thy signs, to our heavenly home, and the salvation of our souls. Do Thou use us as directional signs to those who sit in darkness, who run to and fro through the earth, that they may be placed on the true Way of life everlasting, so that when they shall come face to face with the death of their bodies, they may have a sure and blessed hope in Thy name. Hinder the work of Satan, show forth the lies he has proclaimed, make them known to all and so overthrow his wicked intentions. Show the world that Thou art the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and that no man will be saved, except through Thee. Cause that all Christians would, like John the Baptist, point only to Thee and proclaim: “Behold, the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” Take away our pride and let us rejoice when men follow Thee rather than following us, to the end that Thy kingdom may be full and all men may see the salvation of their souls and the resurrection of their bodies. We ask all these things in Thy precious name. Amen.

Let us hear the Word of our God, dear beloved, learning of directional preaching which:

1. **Points the Way.** We read verses thirty five through thirty seven of our text: **Read verses here.** The example of John in our text is quite astounding. He was a famous preacher, he had many disciples, many who followed him and desired to have him teach them. Yet John knows that the Way to salvation is not through Him, but through Christ alone. The two disciples which followed John the Baptist were Andrew and by virtue of the silence regarding the second, we might safely assume that the second was the writer of this Gospel, the apostle John, for often he refuses to name himself. These two were followers of John the Baptist, and being a directional preacher he does not hesitate to point the Way to these disciples. He says: **“Behold the Lamb of God!”** and earlier, just before Jesus’ baptism he had told all standing there: *“Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” (John 1:29)* John is directing all those that followed him to the Way of salvation, through the Savior, Jesus Christ. He had no ambitions to be a famous preacher and have many men follow him. In fact, even if he had preached the truth of salvation, and at the same time directed men to continue to follow him, he would have been a false preacher like unto the Pope. True preaching consists in minimizing ourselves, and directing men away from one’s self to the true Way of salvation, that of Jesus Christ. This John does, and this we may learn from. This teaching, though aptly applied to all pastors and teachers, is meant for all Christians. Whenever we speak to those who do not believe or to those who are erring from the truth, our primary concern should be to direct men to their Savior and thus point the way to heaven. John the Baptist said in our epistle lesson: *“ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him. He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease.” (John 3:28-30)* He must increase, but I must decrease. When this done, we have done all that we have been called to do: Point the Way of salvation. The rest is left to Christ Himself and His Spirit. We cannot convert men, nor will men who cling to us be converted, but men will be converted when they are shown that the buffet is no true buffet at all, but only one food will fill them and that is Christ. True mission work is not making disciples of our federation, nor of our individual congregation, but making disciples of Christ, and by virtue of this discipleship, converted men will seek out the true voice of Christ found in the orthodox Church. Jesus said to make disciples of all nations, not of ourselves, or our congregation, but disciples of Him. Simply point the way as any good road sign would do and you are a missionary, you are fulfilling the great commission. We have a popular hymn that we often sing which says: “If you cannot speak like angels, if you cannot preach like Paul, you can tell the love of Jesus, you can say He died for all. If you cannot rouse the wicked with the judgments dread alarms you can lead the little children to the Savior’s waiting arms.” (TLH #496:2) One does not have to be a pastor or a teacher, one does not have to be a commissioned missionary to point the Way of salvation. One only need to do as John did and say: **“Behold the Lamb of God,”** while pointing at our Savior. This is a preacher, a teacher, a missionary. This is our calling. This is the path on which Paul is pressing forward to the mark of the prize. And it is a specific Way. Thus in directional preaching we point the Way:
2. **By proclaiming His name.** we read verses thirty five through forty one of our text: **Read verses here.** John is not ambiguous about the Way of salvation. He does not say: behold A Lamb of God, but THE Lamb of God. Whenever a definite article is used, it is an exclusive. It excludes all others who are not being spoken of. Thus the Christian religion, unlike so many others, is an exclusive religion. It excludes from salvation any who do not believe in the name of Christ. This is hard to swallow for many of today’s generations, for it is the prevailing notion that all things are equally valid, all opinions and doctrines are equally a way, but the Scriptures, and John’s words do not leave room for any saviors, or any gods, who are not the definite One of which he was pointing. Thus directional preaching is not pointing a way, but THE Way of salvation, for there is only one. And this Way does not have many branches veering off of it whereby one might still find salvation. No it is straight and narrow. It is limited exclusively to the doctrine and teaching of Christ’s name alone. Any portion of doctrine which deviates even in the slightest degree is a satanic deviation and is not found on the path of life. Now having said this, some may hold and teach some false doctrine and still be saved, but that is due not to there being different paths of salvation, but due to the grace of God to keep them on the Way in spite of their error. And if they cling to that error and truly believe it as necessary for salvation they have departed from the path of life. For example a Roman Catholic might still be saved if, in spite of their idolatry in praying to the saints and Mary, they cling to the grace of God in Christ. This does not mean that the Way of salvation is through the saints or Mary, but that God graciously guards their hearts against this satanic threat and preserves them in spite of it. Again a Baptist might still be saved if, in spite of their decision theology, they believe that God has graciously forgiven them for the sake of Christ and this is in no way a work of theirs. This is what is often called happy inconsistencies, for if they truly clung to their false doctrines they would have to deny the very name of Christ and thus be condemned. It is then our calling to point the way by proclaiming the name of Christ, the whole name of Christ and His teaching, nothing more, nothing less. This is true directional preaching which can lead a soul to salvation. It points the way to salvation by proclaiming Christ’s name:
3. **Without grudging.** We read verses thirty five through forty one of our text: **Read verses here.** After the events of our text John the Baptist is only mentioned twice more, once when he said He must increase and I must decrease, and the second when he was cast into prison. Our text is the moment when, because of His pointing to Christ and The Way, his popularity waned and finally was extinguished altogether. And while he was a man used greatly by God for His good purpose, he was only a man, a man who offered nothing to the world of sinners whereby they might be saved apart from His pointing out the Savior. One could even say that our text was the pinnacle of his activity, for it was here that his work began to cease, it was here that he decreased and Jesus increased, and so it should be. When any Christian preaches he should never begrudge the fact that men are disciples of Christ. When John points to Jesus his disciples immediately became Jesus’ disciples and John was nothing more than an afterthought. It is unfortunate that often our flesh wants some recognition concerning the work that we have put in, that our flesh would like to say, look at all the disciples I have made, I have filled the pews, I have done such and such for the kingdom of God, yet this is the attitude of the flesh and should be loathed by every Christian. In our preaching we should disappear and Christ should shine forth as the Sun. We are nothing, He is everything. He is the Way, and we should be honored to be used by God as signs on the Way of salvation pointing the Way. God does not need us, He does not rely on us to do this, but He gives us the opportunity and the privilege to point the Way, but we should be forgotten as soon as we are passed by those who see us. We should be no more memorable than a mile marker on a long journey, for it is not about those that point the Way, but the Way itself and the destination. The apostle Paul once said: *“who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase.” (1 Cor. 3:5-7)* Therefore dear Christians, let our preaching and commission ever be nothing else than: *“Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.”* For He must increase and we must decrease to the end that disciples be made of all nations, that disciples of Christ be made of all nations, that our joy therefore might be full and we might forever give thanks together: *“O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good: for His mercy endureth forever.” (Ps. 136:1)*  Amen.