

[John 1:29-42](#)

I once said of John's Gospel that John won't settle for one meaning of a word when ten will do. It's a Gospel packed with symbolism, even in the literal stories.

And that's true in our passage today, from the very first words of it: 'The next day' (verse 29). There is a whole series of references in the first two chapters of his Gospel to time: this is the first of three times John says 'The next day' (also in verses 35 and 43). So they are days two, three, and four of a week.

Then chapter two opens with 'On the third day', a phrase that has meanings all of its own when you know about the Resurrection. But if you add it to the first four days we have a week in the life of Jesus.

Now is John just showing us what a typical week in the ministry of Jesus was like? No. A Gospel that has begun with the words 'In the beginning' and then alludes to seven days is telling us that these are not seven days of creation, but seven days of re-creation, as Jesus has come to make all things new. These stories are telling us some of the ways in which Jesus brings salvation by making the old, decaying, sin-afflicted creation new.

In today's reading, we see the part that discipleship plays in the new creation. We see two gifts God gives us, and two responses he calls us to make in order that we may be true disciples of Jesus.

Of the **two gifts** the **first** is ***the Lamb of God***. Twice in our reading John the Baptist tells his disciples, 'Look, the Lamb of God' (verses 29, 36). Of course, by 'Lamb of God' he means Jesus.

And in the first of those two references, John the Baptist goes further:

'Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!'

'Takes *up* the sin of the world' is arguably a better translation: Jesus the Lamb takes up the sins of the world like he takes up the Cross. He takes them up onto himself. The very thing which has been wrecking creation, namely sin, is taken out of the way by the One who will die at the time of the Passover lambs. Instead of Israel being passed over for death because her homes were marked with the blood of Passover lambs in Egypt, now anyone marked with the blood of the Lamb of God is passed over, too.

Not only are they forgiven, but their sin is removed because the Lamb of God has taken it up. This is the first gift of a discipleship for a new creation. People are made new as sin is taken up from them by Christ.

‘If anyone is in Christ – new creation!’ wrote the Apostle Paul to the Corinthians. We are made new at the Cross, and creation is taken in the direction of newness rather than decay by the removal of our sins.

What is the application for us? Well, obviously praise and rejoicing. But we will come specifically to application in the two responses in a few moments’ time.

The **second** of the **two gifts** is ***the gift of the Spirit***.

³² Then John gave this testimony: ‘I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. ³³ And I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptise with water told me, “The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is the one who will baptise with the Holy Spirit.” ³⁴ I have seen and I testify that this is God’s Chosen One.’

Put simply, the Holy Spirit is permanently with Jesus and Jesus will give the Holy Spirit permanently to his disciples.

If the first gift, Jesus the Lamb of God, removes sin from us and from creation, then the second gift, the Holy Spirit, enables us to live in newness of life following that. The Holy Spirit brings the power to live like the new creation is here.

But of course we know that’s a battle. Paul has a wonderful passage on this in Galatians chapter 5 where he talks about living in the flesh versus living in the Spirit. ‘Flesh’ here is not our bodies but our sinful human nature that does not want to do the will of God. He says, you won’t win the battle just by keeping the Law, the religious rules. It’s no good just applying willpower, because you will fail. Instead, he says, you crucify the flesh as you live by the Spirit and keep in step with the Spirit.

So how do we live by the Spirit who has been given to us? By adopting lifestyles that are hospitable to the Holy Spirit. Historically, Methodists have called these the ‘means of grace’. These days, Christians more often call them ‘spiritual disciplines’ or ‘spiritual practices.’ A church leader from Portland, Oregon named John Mark Comer has a course to help groups of Christians learn and practice the disciplines so as to be open to the Spirit. It’s called

[Practicing The Way](#). The course teaches each practice over a four-week period, and that includes putting it into practice. Were I remaining here longer I would be introducing this big time, but instead I commend it to you for personal study and house groups. (It's free of charge.)

These, then, in brief, are two gifts of God that work to bring in the new creation. We have Jesus the Lamb of God who removes all the old creation sin to give us and the world a new start. And we have the Holy Spirit, who helps to live in a new creation way.

But I also said there were two specific examples of our response in the passage. What are they?

The **first** of the **two responses** is *being with Jesus*.

When John the Baptist identifies the Lamb of God for a second time, two of his disciples leave him to follow Jesus, and the earliest expression of that following Jesus is wanting to see where he is staying (verses 35-39). In other words, they want to be with Jesus.

If you are going to follow someone you had better get to know them, and that's what happens here. Sure, there is a lot of work in the world with which the Christian needs to get on with, but none of that kind of following Jesus makes any sense unless we have spent time with him, getting to know him and his ways.

That's why you can't choose between prayer and action as a Christian. Prayer feeds action. We need time with Jesus and then time in the world. Some people disparage prayer as 'wasting time with God', but it's the best waste of time you can ever fritter away.

How might we do this? Don't just speak to him, listen as you also read the Scriptures prayerfully. Learn not only to be alert for what he wants you to do, but also be open to him disclosing his heart and his passion to you.

You can be with Jesus on your own. You can be with him in the company of a small group or of a congregation. It's best to be with him in all of those permutations.

But whatever you do and however you express it, make sure that spending time with Jesus is a priority, because it sets you up for following him in the world. And it gives you the agenda for your part in God's new creation.

The **second** of the **two responses** is *bringing people to Jesus*.

⁴⁰ Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. ⁴¹ The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, 'We have found the Messiah' (that is, the Christ). ⁴² And he brought him to Jesus.

We don't read much about Andrew in the Gospels, but on those rare occasions when he does become centre-stage in the narrative he's often bringing people to Jesus. As well as this incident, he also brings the boy with the five fish and two loaves to Jesus, and he brings some Greeks who want to see Jesus.

Andrew is the quiet evangelist. Not for him the crowds to teach and preach to like Jesus. But he knows he has encountered someone special in Jesus and he wants other people to know. He doesn't always know a lot, but he knows enough to say, 'We have found the Messiah' and encourage others to try him out, too.

What Andrew does (and quite consistently here) is like the modern-day Christian who knows that Jesus would make a difference in the life of a friend and invites them to come to church.

Simple invitations. Not grand sermons. Not great intellect. Just someone who has had a transforming experience of Jesus Christ and realises that many people need him. This is the chance for others to find who can release them from the deathly habits of the old creation and bid them come into the new creation.

Conclusion

From 'In the beginning' at the opening of Genesis to 'In the beginning' at the opening of John's Gospel: we jump from creation to new creation.

How this world needs to be made new. Disciples whose old ways of sin have been lifted off them by Jesus the Lamb of God and have been given the powers of the new creation in the Holy Spirit are part of Jesus' plan to make all things new. We can get our bearings for following Jesus from being with him, and we can invite others into his saving presence so that they too might be renewed and signed up for the work of God's kingdom.

It therefore just remains to ask: what part is each of us playing?