

The Bethel Pulpit

Pastor Martha Butzier

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BETHEL

LUTHERAN CHURCH

On the web at www.bethel-madison.org

312 Wisconsin Ave, Madison WI 53703

Text: John 1:6-8; 19-28

Title: Look!

I was a follower of John. Staunch and steadfast, I grew to love him as if he was my own brother. To say I was devoted was an understatement. Our paths crossed when I was at an extremely low point in my life; John revealed to me with deep heart felt compassion the message of a God who simply loves everyone, even me when I was living on the streets of my home town. John did what no one else had ever done. John looked me straight in the eyes, cupped both of my hands in his, and said, "Peace be with you." In that moment, a tremendous sense of joy and calm washed over me; for the first time in a very long time, I felt loved and accepted for who I was, a hungry, unemployed, homeless woman.

I was with John that day; I heard all that he said, and I must tell you I was troubled, so I went to John in private later that day to lay out my concerns. John, I don't understand why you said things the way you did today. I have learned some things about how to gain status and notoriety. Remember I used to be an image consultant before I lost it all. I have some helpful hints to share with you that I am sure will catapult your image to the forefront of peoples' minds. Promoting one's image takes finesse. We need to create a vivid portrayal of you that will spring into peoples' minds the second they hear your name. I am confident that I can help you make your name a favorite in every household. But some need to make some changes in way you talk about yourself; you have to learn to point to yourself, identifying your own remarkable qualities and accomplishments. Show them your charm, your charisma; then they will be prepared to hear the rest of your message. John stood quietly listening to me, so I kept going.

As I look at how you have depicted yourself today, I see a person who is underestimating and overlooking their own best interests. Success is determined by how well you can sell yourself pointing to your finer qualities and yes, I even think you can over state who you are to reach the masses more effectively. The first thing you absolutely must do is stop using the phrase, "I am not..." You sound so negative about yourself when you say, "I am not the light, I am not the Messiah, I am not Elijah, I am not the Prophet." You are playing such an important part in the book of John; play it for all the attention you can get. Point out just how important you are. You must answer the question of who you are in boldly and positively terms.

I could see that John was getting a little disturbed, shifting his weight from one foot to the other, and he came back at me. My friend, you are missing the point. You misunderstand; I was given the job of giving witness to the true light of the world. I am not the Messiah, but he is. I am not Elijah or the Prophet. Mark called me John the Baptist, but here today I am only John. Only God made flesh in Jesus like you and me can say, "I am the light of the world." Only the one who is one with God can say, "I am the Messiah." I am not even close to being worthy enough to untie his sandal. All my meager accomplishments pale in comparison to who he is and what he will do for the sake of the whole world. I do want to play it for all it's worth, but I must point to him. I know with great certainty that the message Jesus will deliver will come from the very mouth of God. His message of love, justice, compassion for the outcast is the truth that the world needs to know. I am not God, but he is.

I am the first witness to his grace and mercy and truth. All who are gathered here today are to hear my voice clearly telling them there is another One who is coming who will increase far beyond what any other human could attain. His glory, his grace, his compassion, his mission will be spread around the world first by me and then by all who are

gathered here today. I am not he, and I don't want the message delivered here today to be distorted in any way that might cause the listeners to be distracted from the One saves the world.

There are already enough distractions. My friend, my sister you are more loyal to me than to Jesus which is why I must be so clear about who he is and who I am not. Our lives are full of distractions and incredible darkness. When I am long gone, dead and buried, he will live on into infinite tomorrows.

Wherever we venture there are distractions. You have fallen victim to the distraction of miss placed loyalty. It is easier to be followers of a person who holds power and influence over others. It's easier to follow a person we can see with our own eyes and reach out and touch than to follow Jesus that we cannot see. There's a bit of the doubting Thomas in all of us. That's one of the pitfalls of life in the church. We shift our attentions toward the loudest voice at times instead of the God we cannot see. It's easy for us to pledge our loyalty to a building or another person or a political party. Our believing falters and instead of pointing to Jesus and his power- his commitment to seeing to the needs of others, we point to other things – other people who become our Gods. They will not bring us hope or peace, joy or love. This place, Bethel Lutheran Church, exists only to point to Jesus. He is the light of the world. He gave up his own life for us.

Oh, I think I get it now. When you said, "Look, behold, the Lamb of God!" those words were meant to go on and on and on into the future as our witness to who Jesus is for the world. We point to Jesus as the most important person to ever enter our lives. When we say, "Look!" pointing to him light appears in the darkest places because that's where we need him the most in the darkest place. The tiniest ray of light is just enough to expose the injustice of racism and hatred. The tiniest ray of light is just enough to work its way into the most hardened of hearts sparking a transformative fire. And one day the now hopeful heart will take its turn preparing the way for another nearly dead heart pointing and saying, "Look!" Jesus changed my life. Amen.