



Worship and Sermon Suggestions

1) Hymn suggestions:

a) from Lutheran Book of Worship:

- 285 Spirit of God, sent from heaven abroad
- 286 Bow down your ear, Almighty Lord
- 381 Hark, the voice of Jesus calling
- 383 Rise up, O saints of God!
- 403 Lord, speak to us, that we may speak
- 406 Take my life, that I may be
- 472/3 Come, Holy Ghost, our souls inspire
- 492 O Master, let me walk with you
- 494 Jesus call us; o'er the tumult
- 503 O Jesus, I have promised

b) from With One Voice:

- 652 Arise, Your Light Has Come!
- 683 Loving Spirit
- 712 Listen, God Is Calling
- 723 The Spirit Sends Us Forth To Serve
- 752 I, the Lord of Sea and Sky
- 753 You Are the Seed
- 754 Let Us Talents and Tongues Employ
- 755 We All Are One in Mission
- 756 Lord, You Give the Great Commission
- 773 Send Me, Jesus
- 776 Be Thou My Vision
- 784 You Have Come Down to the Lakeshore

c) from Evangelical Lutheran Worship

- 574 Here I Am, Lord
- 575 In Christ Called to Baptize
- 576 We All Are One in Mission
- 579 Lord, You Give the Great Commission
- 580 How Clear is Our Vocation, Lord
- 583 Take My Life, That I May Be
- 593 Drawn to the Light
- 712 Lord, Whose Love in Humble Service

715	Christ, Be Our Light
769	If You But Trust in God to Guide You
798	Will You Come and Follow Me
801	Change My Heart, O God
808	Lord Jesus, You Shall Be My Song
810	O Jesus, I Have Promised
817	You Have Come Down to the Lakeshore

2) Prayer suggestions:

A Gracious God, we thank you for calling us in our baptism to be your people in Jesus Christ. Fill us always with joy and gratitude for the precious gift of your grace. Help us to live each day in love, as you have first loved us. Lord in your mercy,

C Hear our prayer.

A Lord of the church, we pray that you would raise up pastors and diaconal ministers to serve your church. Give to us all a new passion for ministry. Set our hearts on fire with your love. Fill us with boldness and gladness to proclaim your Word in the church and in the world. Lord in your mercy,

C Hear our prayer.

A Lord, you know the needs of your church today. We thank you for the example of pastors and diaconal ministers who have gone before us, who have led your church in the past. Like them, help us to respond to your call by dedicating our lives to your service. Lord in your mercy,

C Hear our prayer.

A We pray for our congregation, and for all who worship here this day. Be with us in our common life together. Open our eyes to recognize the loving presence of Christ in each other. Help us to encourage those who are called to ministry in our congregation. Lord in your mercy,

C Hear our prayer.

A You give each of us opportunities to live out your calling each day. May we always seek new opportunities to do your will. Help us to show Christ's love and compassion to our families, neighbours, co-workers and even strangers we encounter day by day. Lord in your mercy,

C Hear our prayer.

A We remember before you this day those who are in special need around us: the sick, the lonely, the destitute, the homeless, the persecuted. Especially we pray for _____. Look with compassion upon those in our world who live with injustice, fear, hatred and oppression. Use us to be agents of your love; help us to care in practical ways for those around us who are in need. Lord in your mercy,

C Hear our prayer.

3) Sermon Reflections on the Gospel Lesson: John 1.29-42
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Unlike the other New Testament Gospels the Gospel of John does not provide a description of Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist. Instead, in this Gospel John the Baptist functions primarily as a witness to Jesus. In John 1.29

Jesus' identity and mission are revealed by John the Baptist when he sees Jesus and says "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" The same pattern of seeing Jesus followed by describing his mission is found later in this same pericope in v.36. The term "Lamb of God" has many layers of meaning.

1) The symbol of a lamb appears in ancient apocalyptic literature, for example the book of Revelation where Jesus is portrayed as the "Lamb that was slaughtered" (Rev 5.6-14); this imagery is of course picked up in the hymn of praise from the Eucharistic liturgy "This is the Feast." In Revelation Jesus is also a conquering Lamb (5.7, 17.14). This view of Jesus as the eschatological Lamb fits with John the Baptist's apocalyptic style of preaching (Luke 3.7-9, 16-17). So, in today's reading, on one level John the Baptist's description of Jesus as the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1.29, 36) is a way of identifying Jesus as the apocalyptic Lamb sent by God to conquer the forces of evil at the eschaton. It is important to remember that contrary to fundamentalist interpretations of Biblical "prophecy" Jesus does not defeat the forces of evil through violence but rather through being killed on the cross - that is how Jesus "takes away the sin of the world" and why he is "worthy to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing" (Rev 5.12).

2) The Suffering Servant figure in Isaiah is also depicted as a lamb (Isaiah 53.7). We know that one way that the early Christians made sense of the fact that, contrary to expectation, their Messiah had been killed was by interpreting Jesus's death in terms of the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53 (see Acts 8.32, Matt 8.17, Hebrews 9.28). The Gospel of John echoes this latter part of Isaiah (so-called "Second Isaiah") when John the Baptist says "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him" (John 1.32, see Isaiah 42.1, 61.1). The Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53 is also invoked in John 12.38 (quoting Isaiah 53.1). Thus the "Lamb of God" in John 1.29, 36 can also be taken as a reference to Jesus' death "like a lamb that is led to the slaughter and like a sheep that before its shearers is dumb" (Isaiah 53.7); note also the corresponding "sheep" imagery in the preceding verse: "all we like sheep have gone astray, we have all turned to our own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53.6).

3) John the Baptist's description in our text of Jesus as the "Lamb of God" can also be taken as a reference to the Passover Lamb. The theme of Passover is often used with reference to Jesus in the Gospel of John. Thus (unlike the Synoptic Gospels where Jesus is killed on the day of Passover itself) according to John 19.14 Jesus was condemned to death at noon on the day before Passover, which was the time when the priests in the temple began to kill the passover lambs. In John 19.29 Jesus is offered a sponge full of wine on a hyssop branch, and according to Exodus 12.22 the blood of the Passover lamb was applied to the doorposts of the Israelites with hyssop. In John 19.36 the fact that Jesus died without any of his bones having been broken is regarded as a fulfillment of Scripture; the reference is probably to Exodus 12.46, which says that no bone of the Passover lamb is to be broken. Such use of Passover associations to express the meaning of Jesus' death occurs very early in Christian tradition, since the death of Christ brings about freedom from death as did the blood of the lamb of Passover. Note that the Passover lamb was not sacrificed to take away sin; however, this notion is added to the identification of Jesus in 1 Cor 5.7: "Christ our Passover lamb has been sacrificed".

These three levels of meaning included in the description of Jesus as the "Lamb of God" (the apocalyptic lamb, the Suffering Servant, and the Passover lamb) are a reminder of the richness of interpreting the Gospel of John where imagery often operates on more than one level of meaning. John 1.29 also asserts that the Lamb of God "takes away the sin of the world". The Greek verb used here (*airein*) is frequently used in the New Testament to express pardoning sin and removing guilt. 1 John 3.5 refers to taking away "sins" (i.e. sinful acts) while the singular "sin" in John 1.29 indicates that Jesus also removes humanity's sinful condition.

John the Baptist's assertion of the pre-existence of Christ in John 1.30-31 may be understood as reflecting debates in the early Jesus movement about the superiority of Jesus versus John the Baptist (see also Matt 3.14-15). There is lots of evidence that John the Baptist had his own disciples, who had their own rules of fasting (Mark 12.18, Luke 3.7.29-33) and their own prayers (Luke 5.33, 11.1). After John's death his disciples buried him (Mark 6.29). According to John 3.25 and 4.1 there was some rivalry between John's disciples and those of Jesus. The theme of Jesus' pre-existence, which appears very early in the Christian tradition, is also found in the Prologue of the Gospel of John (1.1-4) as well as John 8.58 and 17.5. John the Baptist also testifies that he saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove and remain on Jesus (John 1.32-33). The representation of the Spirit as a dove is common in the

account of Jesus' baptism in the Synoptic Gospels, so it is likely that Jesus' baptism is in the background of this part of the Gospel of John (though it does not actually describe the event); the symbolism may derive from Genesis 1.2 where the Spirit "hovers" over the primeval waters (like a bird, cf. Deut 32.11).

John 1.35-42 is the Johannine version of the call of the first disciples, and it is quite different from the call of the first disciples in the Synoptic Gospels (Mark 1.16-20 and parallels). In John 1.35-42 the first two disciples start out as disciples of John the Baptist but end up as Jesus' disciples. Then one of these two, Andrew, brings his brother Cephas (Aramaic for "rock," "Peter" in Greek) to Jesus. The message of Jesus begins to spread, and to draw others into relationship with Jesus; and so it has continued ever since.

One of the two disciples in John 1.35-42 is identified as Andrew, Simon Peter's brother (v.40). Simon, Andrew, James and John are grouped together as the first four named in the list of Jesus' disciples (Mark 3.16-19 and parallels), and as the first disciples called by Jesus by the Sea of Galilee (Mark 1.16-20 and parallels). From this Andrew's companion in John 1.35-39 is usually understood to be John, traditionally identified as the author of the fourth Gospel; according to modern scholars the actual author is of course unknown, but the author has made the story more authoritative by placing John anonymously at the scene where Jesus is being identified as the "Lamb of God." Just as John the Baptist had testified who Jesus was (John 1.29, 34, 36) so now Andrew confesses "We have found the Messiah (which is translated Anointed)" (literally "Christos") (John 1.41). The distinctive confession of the early Jesus movement was that Jesus is the "anointed" one promised by God who would bring about God's reign upon the earth; the author gives the Greek transliteration of the Hebrew term for "anointed" (Messiah) and then the translation of that word into Greek (Christos). To say "Jesus Christ" is not simply to speak Jesus' name, it is to invoke that early confession that Jesus is the promised one sent by God; as with kings and priests in the Hebrew Scriptures, "anointing" signifies that Jesus has a mission to perform for God - which is to establish the reign of God among us. To confess that Jesus is the "anointed" agent of God's reign also entails living out God's rule over us - as Christians we are already members of God's reign, even though it has not yet been fully established throughout the earth.

To spread the knowledge of Jesus, to draw people to make the confession that he is the Christ and to live under God's rule are themes that are especially relevant to "It's Your Call" Sunday.

Pastors are evangelists, which literally means "good news-ers," people who are all about the "good news" (evangelion) of Jesus. In our day because of the antics of many so-called "evangelists" the word has taken on connotations of "bad news," and we "evangelical" Lutherans definitely need to reclaim the "good" in proclaiming the "good news" of Jesus through word and deed.

One place that all these themes converge in our text is in v. 38-39. Jesus takes the initiative by asking "What are you looking for?" Jesus asks us this same question today to bring us to the realization that our most basic need is for a relationship with God and God's people. The disciples ask "where are you staying?" and Jesus responds "Come and see". The Greek for "staying" (menein) implies that which is lasting, that which is utterly dependable - through all the up's and down's of life only God's love for us is lasting and dependable - and we can discover this when we "come and see" Jesus himself. Throughout the Gospel of John "seeing" Jesus refers to faith (John 3.21; 5.40; 6.35, 37, 45; 7.37, etc.). Thus "come and see" is an invitation to faith in Jesus that is addressed to us and to those around us. Pastors are called to carry on this whole process. We have the unique position of asking people "what are you looking for?" so that they can discern their spiritual need of God. And we have the privilege of inviting people to "come and see" Jesus as he is present with his church through Word and Sacrament and through the daily lives of people living out God's rule. Pastoral ministry is about inviting all people to trusting faith in Jesus by pointing to him; we are not the focus, Jesus is. As pastors we invite others to "come and see" Jesus and we encourage our sisters and brothers in the church to do the same. This is an exciting and inspiring vocation of serving God and God's people through proclamation and encouragement. These rich themes offer tremendous preaching opportunities for "It's Your Call" Sunday.