

Sermon for January 21, 2018 – “Come and See”

Third Sunday after Epiphany, Year B – Texts: John 1:35-51

Rev. Jeff Colarossi, Westwood First Presbyterian Church

Today, begins a time of the church year that's a bit vague. We've just come from Advent, Christmas and Epiphany; three seasons that tell us stories of Christ's birth and early years. Then Jesus' Baptism came last week as an introduction to His ministry. But now we enter into six weeks of time in-between time. Christmas and Epiphany are over and Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent, is a little over five weeks away (if you can believe that).

We take up with John the Baptist again who showed up a couple times in Advent and again, last week. John, his disciples and the crowds are loitering at the river, when Jesus comes along. This begins soundings like the baptism from last week but there's no mention of it. Instead, this sounds more like the background to the baptism, a behind-the-scenes look at Jesus and the disciples loitering around the river Jordan. As John is preaching the minute he sees Him come along John points out who Jesus is. He says for all to hear, “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” The crowds are there to hear John preach but he points them to Jesus instead. The very next day when the same thing happens, and again, John points out Jesus, “Look, here is the Lamb of God!” As Jesus walks by John and John's disciples John reminds all who can hear, who this guy is, that He is the Lamb of God, the Messiah. But this time instead of everyone going back about their business, two disciples stop and decide to check Jesus out. We can almost imagine the scene. There's John preaching near the river while Jesus wanders about the crowds almost unnoticed. Maybe He is looking for someone, someone who will show the tiniest sign of recognition. Andrew and Simon finally step forward and when Jesus sees them He asks a question, “What are you looking for?” Andrew and Simon seem baffled by this question. They don't have an answer. But something tells me that they aren't the only ones. Maybe Jesus has been asking people for days, “What are you looking for?” Coming from Jesus this question definitely has a deeper meaning attached. You can imagine that every time Jesus has asked someone the question all He's gotten, to this point, is someone shaking their head, staring at the ground or ignoring Him altogether. So, perhaps we should consider both the question, what it's asking and who's doing the asking. Jesus, the one who John has proclaimed to be the Messiah, the Lamb of God, is asking. Jesus, the one who *we* believe to be God the second person of the Trinity, is asking. And where one person is, so the other two are also. The God and King of the universe, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is asking, “What are you looking for?” So, what would there be to answer? Happiness and Wealth? Love and family? A Long life? Peace in a violent and sinful world? Food for starving children? Cures for cancer and heart disease? An upgrade on your room in heaven? Well, the disciples don't ask for any of those things. Rather, they ask a question of their own, but not a brilliant question that provides food for thought. Something mundane, maybe even ridiculous. Something that if we were asked in our modern way of speaking might sound like, “So, uh, where are You staying?” But at least Andrew and Simon recognized something. They recognize that answering Jesus, saying something, saying anything at all was important. They saw something when John told them who Jesus was and they seem to have at least some sense that responding **in some way** to Jesus is important.

Despite 2000 years of history and a much better idea of just who Jesus is does anyone think we would answer that question any better? For all of our faith, all the time spent in Sunday school, all our indoctrination in the faith, what would our answer be? If Jesus were to show up and ask us whether during a worship service, or during a Session meeting, or during a Monday school class, or one of our bible studies, if He were to ask us: “What are you looking for?” how would we answer? Would we ask Him if He wanted to stick around and run the meeting? Or teach the class? The thing is, we really don’t know. We don’t know what we want when it comes to faith and meaning. We don’t know what we are looking for. For whatever reason, the disciple’s answer Jesus’ question with their own strange question. But they’re no less clueless than we are.

All through Advent and Christmas, we rejoiced at the Messiah’s coming and we talked more than a little about the fact that He’s coming again. We believe that Christ was born, that He lived among us, that He died for us. We believe that He’s present with us right now. But for all that we often have no idea what to do with Him! Like the disciples we find it hard to grasp the magnitude of the Messiah, of Christ being with us here and now. It’s one thing for the long-awaited guest of honor to arrive but it’s another thing altogether to know what to do once the party’s over and the guest of honor is still hanging around. Even more so it’s hard for us to know what to do with God in our lives. Sunday is one thing, but it’s hard to know what this faith business means the rest of the week from Monday morning to Saturday night.

It’s like story that Mark tells later in his gospel. Jesus is walking with the disciples to Caesarea Philippi. On the way, He asks them: “Who do people say that I am?” They offer various answers: John the Baptist, Elijah, one of the prophets. Jesus then asks them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answers, “You’re the Messiah.” You almost want to say, “Good guess, Peter!” How do we answer the question? What do we say? Where do we go? How do we respond? What does that mean for us? What does our response say about us? I wonder what would’ve happened if John the Baptist had heard the disciples answer to Jesus’ question. If he’d heard them say “where are You staying?”, would he have shamed them not getting it? Would he have just sighed, done a face palm, and wondered where he went wrong in trying to teach them? Maybe. But not Jesus. That’s not how Jesus operates. Instead of correcting or condemning, Jesus simply says, “come and see”. Come and See. Jesus gives an invitation, one that’s more than invitation. Instead of calling from the pulpit or the river as John does, Jesus comes near. He looks the disciples and us square in the eye. Jesus does this to pull us into the story of Messiah – His story. He opens our eyes to the new thing God’s doing in the world and in our lives. Jesus isn’t all that concerned whether or not we know the answer to His question. Why? Because He knows that we probably haven’t the faintest idea of what we’re looking for. Jesus knows that we’re wondering life about faith and meaning, about suffering and death, about hope in the hopeless, about finding the lost, about light in the darkness. We’re wondering about the Messiah. Jesus knows that we have far more questions than answers. But Jesus does not condemn us for that, for not knowing what to do with Messiah. Instead He offers three gracious words, words that grab onto to us and hold us. Come. Come, with me and we will walk through this life together, you and me. These are words that show us God. See. See, here I am, here I will stay. Take my hand, I will not abandon or forsake you. Come and See. Come. And. See.

Jesus doesn't expect us to answer His question, He answers it for us. "What are you looking for?" "Come and See" Jesus says. Come and see the Messiah, Emmanuel, God with us, the Word made flesh dwelling among us. The God who comes to look us in the eye and take our hand in his. The Messiah who doesn't just come for Christmas dinner and then goes home. No, this is the Messiah who's come into our world to stay, who's come into our messy lives. This is the Messiah, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. This Messiah is here – now. He makes Himself know by rolling up His sleeves and wading into the middle of our confusion, our brokenness, knowing that we don't know what we're looking for. Come and see. Such simple, open, and inviting words. Words, I believe, that not only sum up John's gospel but the whole of Christian life! For John it's the only response. The only response to having witnessed God's grace and mercy take human form incarnate in the babe of Bethlehem, crucified at Golgotha, raised on the third day all for our sake!

Come and see. These are the words we're invited to say to others. Those who are seeking something more from life than what the world has to offer. Three simple words. Come and see!

Thanks be to God.

Amen and amen.