

Sermon for January 26, 2020 – “Come and See!”

Third Sunday after Epiphany, Year A – Text(s): John 1:29-42

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Today begins a time of the church year that’s more than a little ambiguous and vague. We’ve just come from Advent, Christmas, and the Day of Epiphany that tell us stories of Christ’s birth and early years. Then the Baptism of Jesus came three weeks ago as an introduction to His ministry. But now we are now actually three weeks into what will be roughly seven weeks of in-between time. Yes, Christmas and Epiphany are over, and Lent is exactly a month away. It begins on Wednesday, February 26 which is, of course, Ash Wednesday.

And so in this in-between time we receive an in-between story. We take up with John the Baptist again who showed up a couple times in Advent and again three weeks ago. John, his disciples and the crowds are loitering at the river when Jesus comes along. This sounds like the baptism from last week but there’s no explicit account of Jesus’ baptism today. In fact, the baptism has already happened. As John is preaching and the moment he sees Jesus he points out to everyone there who Jesus is. John, who rarely pulls his punches, tells these people that Jesus 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. But people don’t seem to be picking up what John is saying so they just continue doing what they were doing. So the next day, when the same thing happens again John has to point out Jesus again. As Jesus walks by John and John’s disciples John reminds all who can hear that this is the Lamb of God. The Messiah. But this time instead of everybody going back to their business, two of John’s disciples stop and decide to check Jesus out. We can almost imagine the scene. Here’s John preaching near the river baptizing people, while Jesus having been baptized Himself, wanders about the crowds almost unnoticed. Maybe he’s looking for someone, maybe He’s looking for anyone to show even the teensiest, weensiest sign of recognition. Actually, I’d bet willing to bet that that is **exactly** what He was doing, which is looking for followers.

Finally, 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 surely they aren’t the only ones. Maybe Jesus has been asking people for days, “What are you looking for?” And, of course, coming from Jesus this question surely has a deeper meaning. You can imagine that every time Jesus has asked someone this question so far all He’s gotten is someone shaking their head, staring at the ground pretending that they didn’t hear the question or thinking that Jesus was just another lunatic preacher like John. So, yeah, considering that it’s Jesus who’s asking the question it’s hardly an innocent one. Yep, Jesus, the one who John has proclaimed to be the Messiah, the Lamb of God, **He** is the one who’s asking. Jesus, the Son of 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?”

An important question, then, definitely but perhaps equally so would be our answer. And what would that be, exactly? What ARE we looking for? Happiness and wealth? Love and family? A long life? Peace in a violent and sinful world? Food for starving children? Cures for cancer, dementia and heart disease? An upgrade on your room in heaven? Interestingly, the two disciples don't ask for any of those things. Rather, they ask a question of their own. But not a brilliant theological, Christological, eschatological, or any other kind of logical question intended to wow Jesus with their acumen. They apparently believe the old adage that if you can't dazzle someone with brilliance baffle them with BS. They ask: "So, uh, hey Jesus...where are You staying?" But the interesting thing here at the very least is that Andrew and the other unnamed disciple, probably John himself (he writer of the Gospel, not the Baptist) recognized that answering Jesus, saying anything at all was important. It seems to me, then, that they saw something when John the Baptist told them who Jesus was and so they have this sense, however vague, that responding in some way to Jesus is important. I think that most of us would agree. Still, despite 2,000+ years of history providing us with a much better idea of just who Jesus is affording us a much better perspective. I doubt that we would answer that question much better for all of our church buildings and denominations, our Christian nations and empires, our indoctrination in the faith, our various doctrinal and dogmatic, our theological, Christological, and eschatological ruminations, would help us fare any better.

If Jesus were to walk in the doors of this sanctuary right now and ask us, "What are you looking for?" How would we respond? What would we say? Would we ask if He would like to join the church? Would we ask if He was willing to serve on Session or on any of the committees? Would we ask Him if He'd like to donate to help fix the stained-glass windows? (I mean, after all, they do tell the story of His life, right?) The thing is – we just don't know. We don't know what we want when it comes to faith and meaning in our lives. We don't know what we're looking for especially where Jesus is concerned.

For whatever reason the disciple's answer Jesus' question with their own strange question. Maybe it was simply that they were caught off-guard by the question, but I'm not convinced that there wasn't more. But they're no less clueless than we are.

All Advent, we waited for Messiah. At Christmas we rejoiced at Messiah's coming. At the Epiphany, the Messiah, the Christ, God in flesh through the Magi was revealed to us. But now that Messiah is **here** we don't really know 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. Think about it. It's one thing for the long-awaited guest of honor to arrive but it's another thing entirely to know what to do once the party's over and the guest is still hanging around. Where are you staying? (Here? Oh geez, the place is a mess!) Even more so, it hard for us to know what to do with God in our lives. Hard to know what this faith business means between Monday morning and Saturday night. What does any of this mean for us? What do we say? Where do we go? What do we do? How do we respond?

One has to wonder what John the Baptist might have said or done if he'd heard the disciple's response to Jesus' question. I suspect that he might've shamed them not getting it, though John himself would later, in prison, have his own doubts. But shaming or condemning well, we know that that's just not Jesus' way. Instead of correcting or condemning Jesus gives a simple answer, "Come and See". Come and See. I say that because I firmly believe that Jesus recognizes something that's not immediately obvious and that the disciples were **there**. They were there with John on the banks of the River Jordan. We can assume that they were baptized as were so many others, but unlike all those others they stuck around. They wanted more even if they didn't know how to articulate it. Even if they didn't really have the faintest idea what it was they were looking for. I think we can all relate to this, no? Maybe that's why we're here today. If we haven't recognized the Gospel reading for what it is I'll give you a hint, it's a call story! It's the Gospel of John's version of Jesus calling His first disciples! Ordinary people like you and me being called to find what we're looking for, being called to come and see!

Jesus gives an invitation that's **more** than invitation. Instead of calling from the pulpit as I do or the river as John does, Jesus comes near. He meets us where we are. He looks the disciples and us in the eye. Jesus does this in order to pull us into the story. **His** story. A story of which he's been a part of from the very beginning. A story that continues to unfold before our very eyes. Jesus opens our eyes to the new thing that God is doing in our world, in our church, in our very lives. But, brothers and sisters, here's the thing, Jesus is NOT looking for us to know the answer to His question. Jesus knows that we haven't faintest idea. Jesus knows that we have questions of our own. Questions about faith and meaning in a world that seems to be going off the rails. Questions about suffering and death, about hope when all seems hopeless, about finding the lost, about seeing light in the darkness, about who **He** is and what that means for us and for the world.

We wonder as we wander about all sorts of things. Jesus knows that we're full of questions and painfully short of answers. But, rather than condemn us Jesus offers three little words. Words of grace. Words that grab on to us and hold us. Come. Come, with me and I will go with you in this life. They are words that show us God. See. See, here I AM, the God of all things is here. I AM close. I AM right here. I AM. Come and See. "What are you looking for?" "Come and see," Jesus says. Come and see the Messiah, the Word who has become flesh and lives among us. The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. The Son of God. The King of Israel. Emmanuel. God with us and for us. The answer to a thousand questions, the resolution of all the fruitless searches.

Can anything good come from Nazareth? You better believe it! "Come," Jesus says, "Come and see that I have found you, "You will see greater things than these!"

Thanks be to God.

Amen and amen.