

“Come and See” - John 1:29-42

We have become a cynical people, haven't we? In this great age of enlightenment in which science and reason are held in ultimate esteem, we need to be shown before we can believe. We live in the age of analysis, of study after study, a time when we are overwhelmed with an avalanche of information on the web. In the midst of such a barrage of data, information it is difficult to know what's real, what's true, and we become suspicious. Conspiracy theories abound, fuelled by the con jobs that swamp us, con jobs from corporations, financial institutions, our governments, even the church. We have become jaded, and we demand, “show me”, and the only demonstration that we can accept is “come and see”.

Actually, this is not really new, for people of all ages and times have been conned by governments, sales agents, and yes, even religious leaders. We see in our reading today a simple and yet powerful and highly effective counter to such cynicism, as the first of Jesus' disciples are introduced to him.

In preparation for that introduction, and leading up to the episode in today's reading, we are introduced by John the evangelist to John the Baptist. Not surprisingly, in John's gospel we meet a much kinder, gentler John the Baptist than we saw last week through Matthew's eyes. Here he is no longer the cranky wierdo prophet, dressed in outrageous clothing, eating disgusting food, and whipping the people into submission with stinging words. John the Evangelist presents John the Baptist as a sensitive prophet, clear about the visions presented to him by God, and concerned to convey the prophetic message about Jesus, that he is the Lamb of God and the Son of God. And our introduction is no fleeting meeting, with a few words and then him moving off stage. John devotes ten full verses to this introduction to make sure that we know who John the Baptist is, or perhaps more precisely who he is not. He is not the Messiah; he is not Elijah returned; he is not even “the prophet”, whoever “the prophet” was supposed to be. “I'm just the forerunner,” the Baptist honestly and humbly answers his questioners, setting a framework for trust in what follows.

Once we have been properly introduced to John the Baptist, he in turn introduces Jesus to us. John the Baptist goes to great lengths to make sure his own disciples understand that the one upon whom the spirit not only descends but remains is the Lamb of God, the one sent to take away the sins of the world, the Son of God, the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit. He repeats himself, signaling that it's an important subject. What John is so eager to repeat that we retain it is the recognition that the Holy Spirit remained upon (abided with) Jesus. No light kiss, not a quick tag, not a momentary mission, but a constant and permanent abiding in and with and upon.

Finally John the Evangelist introduces to us the first of those who would become Jesus' disciples. “The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples...” From that brief introduction can't you immediately imagine the scene? Whether you picture a scholarly group clustered outside the library at a seminary, or a group of friends by the kitchen door at a coffee hour, or as the younger crowd would say, “a group just hangin'” the expression ‘standing with’ instantly conveys an image of association, of sharing, of togetherness.

What happens next is therefore by contrast most unusual, and highlights the unique nature of this Jesus. The two that were hanging with John the Baptist start to follow Jesus – not in the classic wide-eyed, unquestioning, “I will follow Jesus” mode,

but tailing him to satisfy a curiosity. It's obvious that they were not anything like trained spies or agents, because Jesus 'makes' them right away, and confronts them.

"Whazzup?" he asks them. Well, yes, the text quietly says that he asked them, "what are you looking for?" and that sounds much more friendly like "Whazzup?" than a confrontational and argumentative, "You lookin' at me??"

"What are you looking for?", Jesus asks them, and in return the two ask the most curious question, "where are you staying?" That seems like a very odd question in return, but if we hear that phrased instead, "where are you abiding?" we will, as John expects we will, immediately hear the fuller reply from Jesus, "I will abide with you forever ... I will abide in you, and you in me." Here in this introduction, however, Jesus replies to them with the simple, "come and see." And they did. Went and saw, that is. And more than that, they stayed. They remained, they abided. So much so that one of the two (and it's nice from a Presbyterian perspective that it was Andrew) remained with Jesus throughout his ministry. He remained with Jesus as a disciple (one "under the discipline of", or a follower), and later as an apostle (one who is sent) up until his own death. More than that, Andrew in turn introduced his brother Simon to Jesus, who renamed him Peter, recognizing the staying power of a rock in him (Petros is the Greek word for 'rock').

What a wonderful, fully-packed little text, isn't it? In a few short paragraphs we meet John the Baptist, who testifies to Jesus as the Son of God, and the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. We are introduced more fully to Jesus, and we meet the first of those who would remain with him to the end, and beyond. With repetition and re-emphasis John the evangelist drives home the point about the power of the Holy Spirit remaining with Jesus, the disciples remaining with him, and reminds us of the promises of Jesus to remain with, to abide in us. It is a powerful story, that stays with us.

The question that Jesus asked those first two disciples is the same powerful question he asks us, "what are you looking for?" What are you looking for out of, or in, life? While the specific answers we give to that question may differ widely – success, happiness, peace, at the heart of it I think we tend to look for the same thing – that there is some relevance to life, that it means something, and that we in turn mean something. And so the disciples' question, "where are you abiding?" resonates powerfully with our own questions of Jesus – "are you real?", "are you truly abiding in God, and He in you?", "do you have the power to make me relevant in this universe?", "can you make things OK between me and God?"

The answer that Jesus gave to those first two disciples is also the same answer he give to us – "come and see". That is the only answer that makes any sense. Jesus could have talked until he was blue in the face about theology, about the scriptures, about the power of God – but instead he offered the most powerful demonstration of all – "come, and see".

They did, of course. They went with Jesus, and began to see the power of the Holy Spirit at work in him, evident not only in the words he spoke but in the actions of grace and mercy that he performed. They stayed with him, not just overnight as here in the beginning, but throughout the next few exciting and challenging years as Jesus proclaimed forgiveness of sins through God's grace. Those disciples, and others, came and saw the miracles, the healing, the restoration of sanity and self-worth to countless

people touched by this Lamb of God, this Messiah. They came and they saw how they themselves were transformed, lifted up, made whole, redeemed before God, and they dedicated their lives to passing on that powerful invitation, to “come and see”.

There is another tiny detail in this story that is worth noting – John the Baptist is portrayed as relatively inactive, for example ‘standing with two of his disciples’, while Jesus is shown ‘in motion’, walking towards, walking by, heading somewhere. This subtle but crucial difference reminds us that Jesus was dynamic, an agent of change, challenging people across the entire spectrum from individual to high priest to examine themselves, and their faith, and to respond in kind to the actions of God at work on their behalf. His call was to respond, to react, to “come and see”, to bring brothers and sisters to meet and greet and come to know, to carry the message and the love of Christ to the world.

And that invitation, first issued in that encounter between Jesus and some ordinary men who were hanging with John the Baptist on that fateful day, is now extended to us. “Come and see”, is the invitation that still rings out from the risen Christ, inviting us to find what we have been looking for, inviting us to participate in this proclamation of grace, mercy, love and forgiveness offered by God in His Son, Jesus. Don’t just stand there, come. Let your eyes be opened to the reality of God’s love in Christ Jesus. See how you have been accepted, pardoned, forgiven, and made whole by the one who was baptized in and baptizes with the Holy Spirit. Come and see that power at work – in you.