

Sermon: Come and See

New North Church, Hingham

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Based on **Isaiah 49:1-7; John 1:29-42**

Every week, I ask myself: where to start? It's always a struggle. Eventually, something comes to me, and I think, well, that's not too bad.

This week, it occurred to me that maybe the question isn't where to begin, but where to end, meaning, how do we think this story would play out in our own context today?

Last week, we had a conversation about the different ways our various traditions baptize people. Some churches feature full-immersion baptismal pools hidden under or around the pulpit; some churches baptize people in a local river or even in the ocean; other churches simply anoint people with consecrated water from a bowl. If you're really motivated, you can even get a *portable* full-immersion baptismal pool. Have Font – Will Travel.

In any one of those situations, *what if* the Baptizer suddenly pointed at someone coming toward him and said, "There he is! That's the one! The Lamb of God!"

What would we do? Would we also point to Jesus of Nazareth and say, "Look, God is in our midst?" And what if he looked at you and said, "Come and see." Would you drop everything and transform your life completely?

And then, how would you tell the story to other people? So many questions.

John the Evangelist wrote his Gospel near the end of the first century, long after the events he describes. His faith community had experienced a sharp division between church and synagogue. The conflict in the Gospel between Jesus and the Jews – specifically meaning the religious authorities in the Temple – might also reflect what was going on in his community at the time, and the fundamental issue had to do with who Jesus is.¹

John's way of telling the story is interesting, and he paints a different picture of John the Baptist than the other three Gospels. Here, there is no description of what John was wearing, unlike Matthew and Mark's versions. And in this version, John merely testifies to Jesus' baptism; it's not described in any way, except for the Holy Spirit descending like a dove.

Also, he did not know Jesus but maybe he just had no idea Jesus was the Messiah.

The day before, John denied being the Messiah, Elijah, or a prophet like Moses, opening the door for Jesus the next day, which is when we pick up the story.

John the Evangelist knows exactly who Jesus is, and through John the Baptist and Andrew, one of the first disciples, he tells us: Lamb of God. Son of God. Messiah.

The phrase Lamb of God might bring to mind the Easter Paschal Lamb, but that's different. Instead, think of Psalm 23. God is the Shepherd and Jesus is the Lamb to be guided and nurtured. In chapter 10, Jesus will be identified as the good shepherd to his own flock of disciples, a flock which includes us.

The Son belongs to God in the same relational way as the lamb. There is unity in the father-son imagery: Jesus and the Father are one, as John made clear in the prologue, and Jesus is doing the work of the Father. The common element in these two metaphors is God: through the Son, we encounter God, and through the Lamb God will save the world.

Andrew, one of Jesus' first two disciples, testifies to his brother Simon that he has found the Messiah, and therefore they and the unnamed disciple drop everything to follow the Lamb of God. They completely upend their own lives to follow Jesus to who knows where. They may not even have a clear of idea of the Messiah they seek versus the one they found. But, by acknowledging who it is they follow, they express their identity and their decision to begin anew.

What Andrew, Simon, and the unnamed disciple have done is what every Christian after them has done: confessed Jesus as the Son of God and entered into a sustained communion with him, to follow him, and to follow his teachings as a way of life.

In Isaiah, the Servant, appointed as a light to the nations, is getting ready to speak on God's behalf as God's agent. Christians see Jesus as being this Servant, and we will listen along with anyone else with ears to hear. But the message can't take root if it doesn't ring true or line up with our own experience. We might go along with it for a while, but we'll eventually drop away if it proves false.

So, when the two disciples approached Jesus, he asked them "What are you looking for?" It was both an invitation and a chance for them to examine their motives. For some reason, they wanted to know where he was staying. Literally, Jesus told them, "Come and you will see." They did, and they remained with Jesus the rest of the day, and the day after that.

These two disciples left John to follow Jesus the rabbi as his students. Maybe they were looking for an invitation to follow him, which they got. He welcomed two outsiders to join him.

The same invitation is extended elsewhere in the Gospel. Phillip invites Nathaniel to come and see (1:46); the Samaritan woman at the well invites the whole town to come and see (4:29). These are invitations to see and hear the Son of God's life-changing teachings, and people responded.

What does all this mean for the church today?

If Jesus is the model for us to imitate, then John may be calling the church to be open and welcoming to everyone who wants to know about Jesus and his work. A 'come and see' attitude motivated Martin Luther to translate the Bible into his native German, in order to welcome more people into the church.

Theologically, there is a lot going on in today's readings, but the teachings remain the same: care for the widows and orphans, feed the hungry, and so on. It may be a challenge to figure out how best to do that, but everyone who wants to can certainly jump in to help.

The bottom line is that 'come and see' is Jesus' invitation to discipleship and a new life, and into a new way to live that life.

Amen.

¹ Cousar, Charles B. 1977. "John 1:29-42." *Interpretation* 31 (4): 401-6.