

“Abiding with Jesus”
John 1:35-42
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“The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, ‘Look, here is the Lamb of God!’ The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, ‘What are you looking for?’ They said to him, ‘Rabbi’ (which translated means Teacher), ‘where are you staying?’ He said to them, ‘Come and see.’ They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o’clock in the afternoon. One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon’s brother. He first found his brother Simon and said to him, ‘We have found the Messiah’ (which is translated Anointed). He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, ‘You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas’ (which is translated Peter).”

This is the Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

My Grandpa Ole, my dad’s dad, emigrated from Norway to the U.S. as a 12-year-old boy in the early 1900s. As a 4th grader, I got to visit my extended family who still live in Norway with my immediate family and Grandpa Ole. We got to go to the lake that bears our family name, Lake Arestad, and the old farmhouse where my grandfather grew up. My memories of that trip are some of my greatest treasures. Ever since I’ve known Dexter, I’ve

tried to describe to him the magic of that lake with the lush hills surrounding it like friendly green giants, looking down on a sparkling blue gem of a lake. I've tried to put into words how surreal it was as a little girl to walk across the same creaky floorboards of the farmhouse near that lake, where my grandfather would have rushed to the kitchen for breakfast before running up the road to his little community school. But whenever I tried describing these experiences to Dexter, words always seemed to fail me. Even on my most eloquent days, I could never do justice to the visceral experience I had had in that place.

I don't know about you, but sometimes that's how I feel when someone asks me about my relationship with Jesus. My stumbling responses to those questions frustrate me, because my lived experiences with Jesus are the realest things in my life, and yet whenever I am asked by someone about this Jesus I spend my life following, I tend to get nervous, uncomfortable, and for some reason kind of sweaty. I'm terrified to say the wrong thing. I'm scared I'll come across as preachy or insincere. I'm anxious that no matter how true the words sound in my head, they will not sound authentic once they spill out of my mouth. My experiences with Jesus are treasures to me, but no matter how desperately I want to share them with others, I find that words usually fail me.

That's why it encourages me that *words* do not feature prominently in this story of the first disciples who started following Jesus. You'll notice that when the two disciples of John start following Jesus and ask where he is staying, Jesus simply replies, "Come and see." And then, these disciples proceed to spend the whole day with Jesus, which is why we are told that they were still with him when 4pm arrived. But we are not told about any of the

conversations they had with Jesus during that entire day of being together. No outline of the main points they covered or the deep theological dialogue they might have had. All the text tells us is that the disciples “came and saw where [Jesus] was staying, and they remained with him that day.”

This might not matter so much, except that Andrew, who spent this whole day with Jesus, somehow walked away *changed* from the experience. Something about just being around Jesus for a day made him want to share that experience with his brother, Simon. So what does Andrew do? Does he prepare a presentation with 5 points to convince his brother that Jesus is the real deal? Does he practice his arguments to make sure he can be persuasive in a conversation with Simon? No. The text says that Andrew “first found his brother Simon and said to him, ‘We have found the Messiah’ (which is translated Anointed).” Then Andrew simply “brought Simon to Jesus...”

Perhaps we aren’t told any of the words that were spoken during the disciples’ entire day with Jesus because it wasn’t the words themselves that were important. Instead, it was time spent with Jesus, the living Word, that changed Andrew from the kind of person who would call Jesus a Teacher to the kind of person who would call him the Messiah, the Anointed. It was simple time spent with Jesus, the Word made flesh, that made Andrew want to get up and find a way to share this experience with his brother. And perhaps it was that mysteriously transformative time with Jesus that empowered Andrew not to focus on the words he would say to convince Simon to follow him, but to instead simply say he had found the Messiah, and then bring Simon to Jesus to see for himself. Andrew felt no need to explain Jesus with too

many words. He simply invited Simon to have his *own* experience with Jesus, the Anointed, and left the rest in Jesus' hands.

One of the favorite words of the writer of John's gospel is the Greek verb *meno*. It's a verb we could translate into English as "to stay, to remain, or to abide". It's the verb the writer uses when the disciples ask where Jesus is staying (*meno-ing*) and when the writer says that they came and saw where Jesus was *meno-ing* and they *meno-ed* with Jesus that entire day, til 4 in the afternoon. What's beautiful about this verb is that it is first used by the writer in John 1:32, when the Spirit of God descended like a dove on Jesus during his baptism and *meno-ed*. In that moment, God had spoken to all who could hear that Jesus was God's beloved, and that *meno-ing*, abiding, remaining Spirit in the form of a dove was a sign of that belovedness. The writer wants us to know that in the same way that the Spirit was sent from the Father to remain, stay, abide, *meno* with Jesus, so were these disciples welcomed into that joyful relationship of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as they too spent the day *meno-ing* with Jesus.

Awhile back, Dexter and I started making a bucket list of adventures we wanted to have together. And one of those adventures was for me to take Dexter to that special corner of the world in southern Norway where I had gone as a girl, that place I just couldn't find the words to describe. So this past July, we joined my parents and my brother on a trip to Stavanger, Norway and the surrounding area, including that magical little Lake Arestad where I had first walked in my Grandpa Ole's footsteps. As we spent time there, I was relieved to find that no words of mine were necessary. I just walked with Dexter and my family to the lakeshore on an incredibly rare 80 degree, blue sky day as the

sun beat down on us and we reached down to touch the water. Dexter followed me as we opened the creaking door to my grandpa's farmhouse and we looked out together at the view from the kitchen window, the same view my grandpa had seen a hundred times over a century ago. We jumped in the lake together and swam out to an outcropping of rocks to sit, watching the glittering water for awhile. There was no pressure to say the right words or do it all justice. I had simply brought Dexter to this place, and he was there abiding, *meno-ing*, having the experience for himself. And that made all the difference.

May you hear in this text from the Gospel of John a word of invitation and a word of encouragement. An invitation: Who in your life have you longed to introduce to the Jesus you know but have avoided doing so because words always seem to fail you? Let go of the pressure you feel to find the right words first and simply invite that person to "come and see" Jesus for themselves in that place where you have been abiding, *meno-ing* with Jesus. Where is that place for you? Perhaps you've encountered Jesus in that place you have been serving folks on the margins. Or maybe you've encountered Jesus in this or another community of faith that has been Christ's own body to you on your journey through life. If we let it, this passage can release us from our fear of not having the adequate words to communicate our experiences with Jesus to others. If we let it, this passage can free us to be like Andrew, going to those we love and inviting them to come and see. We are not called to convince others that Jesus is real. But we are called to invite them to meet this Jesus for themselves, trusting Jesus to take it from there as something transformative happens in that mystery of abiding.

And now, an encouragement, especially for those of you who feel like no amount of words could ever assure you of the reality of Jesus' presence in your own life: Lay down your efforts to understand and convince yourself of Jesus and instead simply abide, *meno* in those places others seem to be encountering Him. The beautiful thing about the community of faith, the Church, is that it frees us up to not have all the answers on our own. It allows us to show up exactly as we are, with all our doubts and questions, and let the body of Christ hold onto faith for us when the words spoken to us about Jesus fall short in our own hearts. Be released from the voice that tells you that you have to have Jesus figured out before you can follow Him, and instead come and see for yourself. Spend the day in those places where those you love have encountered Jesus, and wait with open eyes and an open heart. Perhaps this Teacher will become a Messiah to you as you let Him abide with you. It could be that *meno*-ing, remaining in those places with Jesus will make all the difference. Amen.