Servanthood: Come and See

January 15, 2023, Epiphany 2

Isaiah 49: 1-11

John 1: 29-42

Over the years of my ministry with you I have been working to offer ministry and programs that might be of interest not only to our active community but also for those who don’t come or are not interested in coming on Sunday mornings. There are many who don’t want to be involved in a church but who still believe in God and are seeking spiritually. These programs include Film and Faith, our Community Dinners, and Messy Church. One of the ways those not in this community would come to know about these opportunities is for you to invite them. They may be hesitant or unsure, given that most are in the church building, but you could invite them to just come and see.

That’s what Jesus did, when the new followers asked him where he was staying, he said, come and see. It was John the Baptists’ declaration that Jesus was the Lamb of God, that moved two of his disciples to then follow Jesus. It was enough for them to name Jesus as Messiah, and whatever else John had told them about him before, as Andrew also went to get his brother Simon Peter and told him, we have found the Messiah! In asking Jesus where he was staying, they were asking where will we find what we are looking for, a response to Jesus’ question of what are they looking for. Will we find it where you are? ‘Where are you staying’ is also a question about abiding, or what makes you real? You can really only know by coming and seeing, abiding with me. In the narrative the invitation happened around four in the afternoon, and it is speculated that it was the sabbath which meant once the sun went down they couldn’t leave or travel until the sabbath was over, so it was an initial extended stay. Knowing what we know about Jesus, he would not have had his own place but was probably hosted by someone. That would have been their first experience, the generosity of community that this man inspired. Whatever else happened in that evening and day, it was enough to convince them that this man was worth following as they continued with him for the next three years, to his death and his resurrection.

John the Baptist identified Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. There has been much reflecting on what this means, and I would say some unfortunate theology that developed around it. Traditionally, this evolved into the thinking that we are so sinful that God needed Jesus to die for our sins, in essence that God required a sacrifice of Jesus. However, this is not based on scripture. The story and more and more present thinking lean more toward the reality that humanity required the sacrifice, it was humans who killed Jesus. Jesus remained faithful to God throughout it, and God raised Jesus from death, to affirm that his message and actions were right and good and that we are called as his disciples to live in the same way. I describe it as Jesus died because of our sin, not for our sins.

The passage from Isaiah addresses a community in exile who are heading back home. It identifies a servant who with the people of Israel will bring light and salvation to the ends of the earth. This continues the servant theme that has been named as well in previous chapters. In the books of the prophets, justice is a sign of a nation blessed by Yahweh and a call to those who have fallen to sin of injustice. In such a nation blessed with justice, all people have equal access to the goods and services of that place; all people know inherently that their primary responsibility and goal is the welfare, the shalom, of all and each of their neighbors; all people of such a nation know that when any member suffers, all suffer, too. When the early Christians identified Jesus with Isaiah's servant, they implied, whether they knew it or not, that Jesus' primary goal in his earthly ministry was to bring justice to the nations and to root it deeply into the soil of the world. Jesus proclaimed this message when he read from Isaiah 61 which proclaims that:

 The spirit of the Lord God is upon me,

 because the Lord has anointed me;

God has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,

 to bind up the broken-hearted,

to proclaim liberty to the captives,

 and release to the prisoners;

to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour

Jesus adds to this reading, recovery of sight to the blind and most likely included those who were blinded to the injustice around them, that they may see and work for justice.

While the message of this servant is to bring justice one might wonder why it hasn’t happened yet. Again, in Isaiah 42, verses 2-4, it names that the servant will not cry out or raise his voice in public but will faithfully bring forth justice. It will happen quietly, unassumingly, unobtrusively, and probably over a long period of time, perhaps even through many servants each taking steps toward that justice and making changes for a better world. Maybe the Christ continues to work through others to bring justice in the world, that we as disciples are also servants of justice. There have been many examples over history, even in recent history.

Martin Luther King Jr faithfully brought forth justice in his work to end racism, militarism and poverty in America.

Dorothy Day faithfully brought forth justice in her work to address poverty and homelessness and founding the Catholic Worker movement

Matthew Fox helps faithfully bring forth justice in his commitment to Creation Centred Spirituality which sees the earth and creation as sacred blessing of God, along with humanity.

The clergy who stood between the white supremacists and the anti-racist protestors in Charlottesville faithfully brought forth justice.

Traci Blackmon and the United Church of Christ members helped to faithfully bring forth justice by supporting the protesters in Ferguson, Missouri, after the shooting of Michael Brown by a police officer.

Alberta Billy, indigenous Member of The United Church of Canada helped faithfully bring forth justice when she asked the United Church to apologize to the Native Peoples of Canada for what the church did to them in residential schools.

Susan Maybee faithfully brought forth justice when she asked to be ordained in the United Church as an openly lesbian member of the church.

How many people outside of the church know about these faithful seekers of justice? Most people have a very different view of the church than this. Yet if they knew that this is how we live out our faith, that this is how we are called to live out our faith, they might be more interested in church. Maybe we need to invite more to come and see. As we seek to do more together as a church in Regina, the United Church Cluster is having an event January 20 from 6:30 -9pm about our call and vision as a church. I invite you to [come and see](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdnvgVvNv9O85gCr7KHcFznaiOdATeFHUcNrB0NlD2W3AyhcA/viewform) what our call and vision is about, as we explore how we can live out Deep Spirituality, Bold Discipleship and Daring Justice as churches together in Regina. There will be opportunity to discuss in groups how we can work together on issues such as worshipping together, Refugee sponsorships, Addressing the climate crisis, ending Houselessness, and more. Come and see how we can be in ministry together.

May we be servants of justice, servants of God inviting people to come and see what we have to offer. May we be faithful bringers of justice, and servants of light and hope. May we work together to be the church of Regina that is faithful with the resources we have.