

Come and See

John 1:29-42

I read a story about a woman who went to a pet store to purchase a parrot to keep her company. She picked out a beautiful bird that was supposed to be the smartest type of parrot alive. This parrot was guaranteed to be easy to train to talk. She bought a book on training parrots that claimed the technique taught would have her parrot talking within a week. She took the book and her new pet home.

A week went by and she returned to the pet store and complained, "I've followed the book explicitly but that parrot you sold me hasn't said a word yet!"

The storekeeper was puzzled and asked, "Does it have a mirror? Parrots like to be able to look at themselves in the mirror. And then he'll talk" So, she bought the mirror and returned home.

Two days later she was back, announcing that the bird still wasn't saying anything. The storekeeper thought about it for a moment and then said, "What about a ladder? Some parrots enjoy walking up and down a ladder." So, she bought a ladder and returned home.

Sure enough, two days later she was back with the same story, the parrot still wasn't talking. "Does the parrot have a swing? Birds enjoy relaxing on a swing. If he's relaxed then he'll talk." So, she bought the swing and went home.

Well, the very next day she returned to the store and announced that the bird had died. The storekeeper was visibly upset and said, "I'm terribly sorry to hear that!" And then he asked, "Did the bird ever say ANYTHING before it died?" "Yes," said the lady. "Just before it keeled over dead, it said, 'Don't they sell any bird food down there?'"

The text from John's gospel shows Jesus inviting people to follow him, learning from him, and working with him. His invitation to them is stated as a simple and gentle "Come and see." As he invites people to join him, he displays a deep knowledge of who they are. His choice of words is compelling enough that, by the next day, his followers are inviting other people along with the same language: "*Come and see.*" No proclamation of what to believe, no list of requirements, and no denouncing the other side. The "*come and see*" invitation is about a relationship.

First, John the Baptist's disciples follow Jesus, then Jesus speaks his very first words in John's Gospel: "*What are you looking for?*" The disciples follow with a question of their own that seems odd, "*Where are you staying?*"

Jesus has asked a penetrating question; the would-be disciples follow with a question about Jesus' place of residence. John's Gospel is full of these goofy responses to Jesus. People have

great difficulty figuring out who Jesus is or what he is talking about.

Yet perhaps the question is not so strange. "*Where are you staying?*" may be their first, fledgling attempt to figure out Jesus. Often today, when so many of us were born and raised elsewhere, a frequent question is, "Where are you from?" The assumption is that if you can discern where someone's hometown is, you know something about the person.

Jesus responds to their question, goofy or not, with a strange response: "*Come and see.*" Does he mean that they should come and see where he is living or that they should come and see who he is? It's the Gospel of John, so we may not know for sure. With Jesus, there is mystery, ambiguity, and distance between our perceptions of him and the reality of him.

Perhaps Jesus' "*come and see*" is the equivalent of what he says in the other Gospels at this point in his ministry, which is "*follow me.*" A couple of inquirers are being asked to be disciples, invited by Jesus himself. One little detail of the text that may be important (or not) is the order of the words in this phrase. One might expect that the order would be "*see*" who Jesus is, and then "*come*" follow after him. But here the "*come*" precedes the "*see*" so that what's implied is that some disciples first follow Jesus and only later do they "*see*" who Jesus really is and the direction in which he is headed.

In a way, that's the way it is throughout the Gospel of John: disciples stumble after Jesus and only later, along the way, as Jesus corrects their misunderstandings and misperceptions, do they gradually come to see who Jesus really is. Perhaps the Christian faith is one of those experiences that you really understand only from the inside out, as a committed, active disciple.

In today's Gospel those who are invited do what Jesus says. They go to where he is staying and they remain with him. "*Come and see*" for them becomes not only an invitation to discipleship but also a promise about discipleship. They gradually come to see who Jesus is, and in the process they become the ones who invite saying, "*Come and see. We have found the Messiah.*"

I believe that this story of the disciples - who are invited by Jesus and by other disciples to be disciples, who respond to Jesus' invitation to "*Come and see*" and who then announce to others, "*We have found the Messiah*" - to be a story that is continuing throughout the church to this very day.

"*Come and see.*" It's like an open house. People are invited to informally stop in and see a new home, remember an anniversary or a birthday, or celebrate a minor holiday. "*Come and see.*" Don't make a big fuss. Don't dress up. Don't bring presents. Just come and be with us! "*Come and see.*" It's an invitation into relationship. Yes, there is almost always a good "excuse" for the invitation. At its core, however, it is a warm welcome, an openness, a desire for relationship. "*Come and see.*" Andrew's inviting words summoned his brother Peter into relationship with the Christ. It was a simple invitation with no strings attached. "*Come and see.*" This same invitation brings many to Christ today.

This is Jesus' idea of evangelism. It's not a theological discussion or – worse yet - a debate. It's not a question of what we are doing right and someone else is doing wrong. Rather, it is a simple invitation, a matter of hospitality – come and see. Come and see who we are, come and see if you can tell that Jesus is present in everything we do. Come and see to whom we belong.

We hold back because we are afraid, insecure. We don't want to be rejected. We are afraid to come off as being “pushy” or forcing our faith upon someone else.

But the text from John's Gospel shows Jesus inviting people to follow him, learning from him, and working with him. His invitation to them is stated as a simple and gentle *"Come and see."* The "come and see" invitation is about a relationship.

What we need today, more than ever, is the foundation on which Jesus built his community of servants: relationship. That means connections with people who think differently, and perhaps even express those differences passionately, but with the foundation of a shared life. That kind of service, to one another as neighbors, comes with some discomfort, and is not easily done. Being with people like us, who think like we do, is much easier, at least in the short run. But we will never be totally well, either as a nation or as a church, until we hold onto the truth that we are all in this together.

Left and right, Republican and Democrat, billionaire and homeless person, veteran and pacifist, meat-eater and vegan -- we will always have our differences, but we can create and hold onto a genuine sense of community. Only out of a sense of community can we begin to realize peace and wholeness.

Everyone knows that the best form of advertising ever invented and the one that is still most successful is word-of-mouth - people telling other people. About fifty years or so ago there used to be an automobile named the Packard. Packard was the last car manufacturer to buy into advertising. It didn't happen until old man Packard died, because whenever he was approached to buy some advertising for his cars he always said, "Don't need any; just ask the man who owns one." After his death, "Ask the man who owns one" became the Packard slogan.

Our Lord Jesus Christ is also known through word-of-mouth advertising. That's how the word about him gets out. Only the Shepherds at the first Christmas heard the good news from angels. Only the Wise Men were led by a Star. Just a comparative few were touched by miracles. Almost everybody came to know Jesus Christ. Now it is our turn to spread the word about Jesus in our time.

Tomorrow is Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, the day set aside to honor and remember the great, slain civil rights leader. Two months before his assassination, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., spoke to his congregation at Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta about his death in what would oddly enough become his eulogy.

"Every now and then I think about my own death, and I think about my own funeral," Dr. King

told his congregation. "If any of you are around when I have to meet my day, I don't want a long funeral. And if you get somebody to deliver the eulogy, tell them not to talk too long. Every now and then I wonder what I want them to say. Tell them not to mention that I have a Nobel Peace Prize, that isn't important. Tell them not to mention that I have three or four hundred other awards, that's not important. I'd like someone to mention that day that Martin Luther King, Jr., tried to give his life serving others. I'd like someone to say that day that Martin Luther King, Jr., tried to love somebody. I want you to be able to say that day that I did try to feed the hungry. I want you to be able to say that day that I did try, in my life, to clothe those who were naked. I want you to be able to say that I did try to visit those in prison. I want you to say that I tried to love and serve humanity." Dr. King concluded with these words: "I won't have any money left behind. I won't have the fine and luxurious things of life to leave behind. But I just want to leave a committed life behind."

People who are truly captured by the spirit of Christ do so generally after years of walking in Christ's footsteps. Our faith is validated and grows as we "come and see."

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