

Maria Koppelberger - Come and See

Isaiah 49:1-7; Psalm 40:1-11; 1 Corinthians 1:1-9; John 1:29-42

Today is the Second Sunday after Epiphany. We have entered into Ordinary Time, but do not confuse this with “Un-important Time” or “Boring Time”. This season is focused on learning about Jesus, and the calling to follow him, as we make ready for the Season of Lent, which is focused on growing in discipleship.

Last week, we read about the baptism of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew. Today, we read an account of the baptism’s significance in testimony from John the Baptist. Following this description, several verses narrate the call of the first disciples of Jesus.

In verses 29-36 of the reading, John the Baptist describes the identity of Jesus. He is the “Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world,” the one on whom the Holy Spirit descended, the one confirmed by God to baptize with the Holy Spirit, and he is the Son of God.

John sees Jesus walk by, at some point after the baptism, and exclaims, “Look, here is the Lamb of God.” What follows is a fascinating and puzzling conversation between Jesus and two disciples of John the Baptist. The two disciples begin to follow Jesus. It is common in the Gospel of John for words to have double meanings, and this is the case with the word “follow”. The men literally, physically, follow Jesus down the road, but they also begin to spiritually follow him, to seek him. Jesus sees them and asks, “What are you looking for?” They say, “Rabbi, Teacher, where are you staying?” This is a strange response. They don’t answer! But here’s the best part of the conversation: Jesus responds, “Come and see”.

Jesus does not answer the disciples directly, just like they do not answer him directly. He does not tell them everything they want to know, but he knows it’s better for them to see for themselves, to go with him. Jesus wants them to discover for themselves. And he does not force anything on them.

Those simple words begin an extraordinary relationship that fills chapters and chapters of the New Testament. It’s not a one-time thing, to come and see, but a long journey of discovery, misunderstanding, and revelation. And that’s what Jesus invites them to. Jesus does not demand an answer, he doesn’t say, “No, I asked you first.” He doesn’t make sure they know what they’re looking for. There is no test of the disciples’ knowledge or spirituality. No prerequisites. He meets them where they are and invites them to go further. Jesus extends a gentle, open invitation to “Come and see.” He welcomes them to investigate what it means to follow him and to find what they’re looking for. Maybe the disciples didn’t know what they sought. They could have been unsure, or afraid to say. They’re curious about Jesus and he shows interest in them, as well. He wants them to find what they seek. He could have said a million other things. “Come back later.” “Stay with John the Baptist.” Or, “Figure out what you’re looking for, then come back.” But that isn’t his nature. He was ready right away, he shifted his focus to them, and this shows them that they are valuable. Jesus wants them to come and see for their sake, not for his own sake. He is completely unselfish as invites them right into his life.

Last week, we were reminded of the gentleness of Jesus as the Suffering Servant. When he comes, he does not even break a bruised reed. Might these disciples have felt bruised? What a relief this invitation would be. And this week, the description of the Servant's mission in our Isaiah passage highlights the inclusivity of God's servant. The servant is a light to the nations, that God's salvation will reach to the ends of the earth. This is the ultimate in inclusivity. The servant comes not just for Israel, but all the nations.

The Bible is a living book. We can, and should, put ourselves in the sandals of those disciples of John the Baptist. They're not exactly sure what it looks like to follow Jesus. And like them, we do not need to know what exactly we seek. We don't need to fully understand exactly who Jesus is before we decide to follow him. He extends a simple, straightforward invitation showing his hospitality. As Jesus says to those disciples, he says to you, "Come and see." It's okay that we're not sure or that we are bruised—Jesus welcomes us anyway.

His response to these disciples is wonderfully simple, open, unassuming. He welcomes their curiosity. They didn't give him a direct answer, but that's okay. He invites them to walk alongside him and go to where he is staying. He stays with them and talks with them.

Last spring, I spent a wonderful and challenging semester in Central America. Several host families took me in throughout my time there, and it seems their motto was "Come and see." They expressed it with their words, and more important, with their actions. I didn't know what to expect, I didn't know what I was looking for, I didn't know what I would find. I didn't know how to work the shower, I didn't understand their accent, I didn't know how they lived their lives, but my host families knew I wanted to find out and they said "Come and see." They didn't know who I was, but they practiced the hospitality that Jesus extends to the disciples. I experienced so much, and learned so much, all because of their simple invitation to join them.

Just like those Nicaraguan and Costa Rican families I encountered, Jesus, "the one who takes away the sin of the world", welcomes the disciples. He invites them to his home. Whether you're seeking him, or thinking about seeking him, or wondering who he is, know that he invites you to "Come and see." No matter where you are, no matter what you're thinking, or feeling, what you know or don't know, Jesus invites you.

And not only do we find ourselves in the disciples, but in Jesus, as well. We are the disciples *and* we are Jesus in this story. As Christians, we're instructed to act like Jesus. He is our guide. What does our guide do? He invites. As Christ invites us to "Come and see", so should we, the body of Christ, extend to others the invitation to "Come and see." What does it look like for us to act out his invitation? It means having open doors and open hearts. It means allowing people to just come and see. Now, we can't be selfish; this invitation is not only to us, those of us in this church building, but it's an invitation to people outside these walls. It's inclusive, as God's Servant in Isaiah is inclusive. Say "come and see", not "come back tomorrow," not "I'll give you a call about it," just the invitation to come and see *now*.

St. Paul's church makes a space for anyone to come and see, through the office of the sexton. The church building is open, not reserved just for the service on Sunday. It's open all the time for

us to come and see. And we engage in many other activities, from prison visits, to benefit concerts, to travels in India that invite others to learn about Jesus.

And all of this work is wonderful, but we are human. And we're faulty; we mess up. We can do better at inviting others. What more can we do to welcome, walk alongside, and give space for questions, and let people know it's alright to not know? As Jesus is welcoming, we should welcome. As he is inviting, we should invite. As he includes, we should include. Be willing to ask, share, and listen. I urge you to seek new ways to live this out. Join with people who invite. Or begin welcoming those you see others excluding. Continue to be like Christ. Know that Jesus says "Come and see," and so does this church.