

“Come And See” – Kyle Freeze

Ezekiel 37:1-14; Psalm 130; Romans 8:6-11; John 11:1-45

An invitation is a very powerful thing. It tells something about its sender, and gives a message to the receiver. It can signify hope or trust, inviting a person to preach who has never preached before (without a grade being attached to it—unless one of my professors is taking notes and making a rubric). It can signify the most exciting, or awkward, of times, like asking someone out for a first date. It can signify a future, like asking someone to link arms with you till death, in marriage. But today, I would like to look at a different type of invitation—one that is not as easy to swallow, yet one we must realize is coming in the next couple weeks: **an invitation into death.**

A few weeks ago I participated in a Justice for Youth day in St. Louis, put together by GC alum Lexi Baysinger. At this conference Michelle Higgins, Director of Worship and Outreach at South City Church, and BlackLivesMatter activist—who also preached here at St. Paul’s last year—spoke. She said, “As Christians, we will be prepared when we are called to physically give up our lives, because we have been dying to ourselves daily in little acts, all of our lives.” This is the invitation our texts are inviting you into today. It will cost you.

As we look to our gospel text today, we see a common gospel story of Jesus doing the miraculous. Lazarus, a man who Jesus loves, has been sick. In faith, Mary and Martha have sent word, inviting Jesus to come and tend to Lazarus in his illness. They expressed faith through their actions that He was able to heal the sick, as Jesus had done throughout His ministry. Though Jesus loved them, He decided to stay where he was—a little confusing. But He reassured his disciples in verse 4 that, *This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God’s glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.* Eventually, they arrive in Bethany and Lazarus has been dead for four days. Again, Mary and Martha continue to show tremendous faith in the power that Jesus has over illness. They both say, *Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died!* The faith that they both have expressed “moves Jesus deeply” in verse 33. Jesus then asks “Where is he?” *Where have you laid him?*

Mary and Martha then issue a four-word invitation in verse 34 to Jesus, one that I think often gets overlooked. This invitation Jesus will know all too soon and all too well—an invitation into death itself—*Lord, come and see.* Here, Jesus comes face to face with His future—the sights, sounds, and even smells that accompany death. As He accepts Mary and Martha’s invitation into death, Jesus finds a friend, “one whom He loves,” afflicted by the suffering of this world. In this moment, Jesus does not shy away. Instead, He accepts the invitation into death. He embraces the messiness—the stench, the grief, and the suffering—in order to bring life. Even when Martha warns of the stench of her brother, Jesus steps in closer to shine his light in the darkness.

The imagery that is portrayed in verses 38 and 39 parallels and conjures up thoughts of Jesus’ own death—the tomb, the stone, and the people that have been grieving. I often remember Jesus as a person of power and strength, but here we see Jesus very differently. Here, as he stands in front of the tomb where his friend lays dead, Jesus weeps. As I read over these verses, I can’t

help but think that Jesus knows that this is what He is about to endure. He sees himself in Lazarus. He seems to have a moment almost like that in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus sees His fate and struggles. He is about to suffer and enter into death *for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.*

My sophomore soccer season was a tough one. Over the course of the school year, we had three different teammates lose their father to cancer, the last, one of my best friends and best man in my wedding. By the end of the year, it was clear that I had never felt death so close around me. But as I look back upon that year-long journey with my fellow teammates, I realize that I haven't ever felt a connection collectively with others and God that was quite as strong. On this team, it wasn't uncommon to see random prayer that ended in team hugs, surrounding the persons who were struggling. The vulnerability of crying together embraced and empowered us to keep standing in these trials. As teammates, we attempted to be like Christ. We did our best to enter into the suffering of our brother and bring life. I received three invitations into death that year—funerals, as they're normally called. That's more than the rest of my life combined. I very often didn't know what to say or how to respond. It was a very tough season of life. But that was a team filled with Christ-like life. We didn't shy away at the suffering of our brothers, or leave when we had no words. You see, the gospel enters into the presence of death and gives life and hope. That is what we attempted to do as teammates, and it is what we should attempt to do as Christians—to bring life in a world that is hurting.

In our Ezekiel text we see God entering into death and creating life in the valley of the dry bones. He works through Ezekiel the prophet to restore life to the lifeless bones that lay in the valley. Throughout our texts, as well as the events which lie immediately ahead in our Christian calendar, we know that God enters into death and creates life miraculously. It is the whole story of the cross: Jesus lives, dies, conquers death, and in turn, gives life and healing. This is where Jesus gives us the ultimate invitation. Jesus invites us daily to *come and see*. Come and see what true life is like.

We get to see and experience glimpses of this true life when we enter into the suffering of this world. We get the opportunity to enter into suffering and death as Christ did, and bring life where we are invited. My wife Kirsten, as well as my professors, tell me that if I think I am on to something, I need to find someone much smarter and with more experience who has said it better. I can think of no one whose life has openly shown understanding of this invitation into death better than German theologian, pastor, and martyr, Dietrich Bonhoeffer. For any who may not know, Bonhoeffer was a German Christian who openly criticized Adolf Hitler and the Nazi regime. Bonhoeffer's beliefs and convictions led him straight into Hitler's sights and ended at the gallows, where he was hung on April 9, 1945. In Bonhoeffer's book, The Cost of Discipleship, he states, "When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die." To come and see is to come and die—to die to ourselves, our security, our pride, or our possessions.

When others invite us in, saying, "Come and see" my hurt, "Come and see" my suffering, we have the privilege of bringing Christ's life. When my brothers who had lost their fathers invited us to their funerals, we saw, and brought, Christ's life. As we witnessed and experienced pain and suffering in loss, our bonds with our brothers brought some small sense of healing—not the

healing that makes everyone forget about their pain and loss, but rather the healing that provides a glimmer of hope. This hope can't really be fully understood outside of a community that has experienced pain and suffering together. With my teammates that year, we experienced true life. It wasn't the easy life, the kind we all hope for, but it was one that was Christ-like and rich in love and healing in the face of pain and adversity.

And when we find ourselves without an invitation, maybe that's when we should look inside ourselves and invite others in—saying , “Come and see” my hurt. Come and see my Jesus. Come and see.