

Covenant Word

Come and See

Ezekiel 37:1-14; Romans 8:6-11; John 11:28-46, 53-54a

*A Message by
The Reverend Sarah
Jackson Shelton
Pastor
Sunday
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Miracles are a problem. I never knew how much until I was at children's camp with a bunch of elementary age children. The Bible story had been about some miracle of Jesus' and during the telling, one of the boys got up and went to his bunk. By the time I checked on him, he was beyond tears of sadness and was, instead, very angry. "Jesus did not make a miracle for my mother" he said! "She died!"

**Dear Friends,
Thank you for wanting
to read and study these
thoughts more
carefully. Please know
that I do not take full
credit for anything that
may be contained
within, because I may
have read or heard
something at some point
during my pilgrimage
and do not remember
its source and thus,
cannot give the rightful
author his/her credit. I
pray that you will find
inspiration and
encouragement.
Sarah Shelton**

In a simplistic way, this child identified for me the problem with miracles. It isn't that they are not spectacular stories, for they are. They remind us that things will not always be as they currently are. They assure us that what God wants is our healing, our wholeness, and they point us in the direction of just what the Kingdom of God might look like. The problem is, however, we all want a miracle of our own. (Barbara Brown Taylor, "The Problem with Miracles," Bread of Angels)

Every one of us knows someone who could use a miracle, but miracles are hard to come by. Not everyone who prays for a miracle gets one, and there are those individuals who never pray for a miracle, but receive one just the same...so blind-sided are they, they walk away without a hint of praise for God. For centuries, believers have tried to come up with a formula that will make our requests to God for a miracle be irresistible, but alas, miracles do not work that way. Miracles are beyond our control. They cannot be manipulated. They are works of mystery.

We are close to Holy Week, and it is helpful to me that the synoptic gospels record that Jesus, in the garden on that fateful night of betrayal, prayed for a miracle that even he did not receive. He prayed to Abba-God that the cup would be removed from him, but alas, it was still there when he opened his eyes. But then, maybe that is the miracle: that Jesus believed in the power of God more than he believed in his own power. Surely it is some kind of miracle

when we believe that God is God and we are not. (Taylor)

I think that this is the basis of the miracle of Lazarus' resurrection. It begins with Jesus in conversation with Martha. Now these two friends had been around the block a time or two, fussing about who should be in the kitchen and when, and who should sit at the Lord's feet and why. Martha, in her take control way, gets to Jesus before anyone else. She is convinced that Jesus could have made a difference prior to Lazarus' death. Death, she reasons, is beyond even Jesus' powers. Resurrection is only for when the Messiah returns. Jesus then makes an exceptional claim that he is the resurrection and the life, and that if we believe that, then we will never die. He looks her right in the eye and asks, "Do you believe this, Martha?" And she answers, "I believe."

Then Mary comes to Jesus. You remember Mary. She is the same one who sits at Jesus' feet to become a disciple. Some also believe her to be the woman who anointed Jesus' feet with perfume, wiping them dry with her hair. Her disappointment in Jesus' delay has turned into anger, and her grief is palpable. Her

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emotions are so high that just the mere sight of her causes Jesus' stomach to churn and his breath to quicken with anxiety. Scripture says he is "deeply moved and troubled." Maybe seeing the grief of Mary, Martha, and all of their friends, maybe standing in their village makes his own grief so real that Jesus begins a visceral response like we have not seen from him yet in John's gospel.

The conversation between Mary and Jesus sounds directional. Jesus asks, "Where is Lazarus laid?" Mary says, "Come and see." It sounds like, "Let me lead you there...just up this hill and around the corner – just two blocks west and then turn south." But it is so much more than that, and to understand it, we need to comb through some previous events. (Fred Craddock, "Jesus Wept," Journal for Preachers, Easter, 2000)

For instance, in the first chapter of John, Jesus is baptized and when he passes John the Baptist standing with his disciples, John says, "Behold the Lamb of God." The disciples follow Jesus and ask where he is staying. Jesus' response is, "Come and see." (1:38-39) "Come and see" is not directional, it is



Baptist Church of the
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Where Faith Comes to Life.

2117 University Boulevard
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like code language between those early believers. It means if you will follow Jesus, if you will leave everything else behind, if you are willing to take the risks of being a disciple, then you will “come and see.”

We know this because the very next day, Philip is encouraging his friend Nathaniel to also join up. (1:46) Nathaniel’s response is “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” And Philip says, “Come and see.”

Then, in chapter four, we find Jesus conversing with the Samaritan woman at the well. We talked about this just a few weeks ago. In the noon day heat, they break all conventional cultural barriers as they talk of faith and worship and water. Jesus confesses that he is living water of which if she will only drink, she will never thirst again. She leaves Jesus at the well to tell others in her village that she believes him to be the Messiah. Do you remember the words she uses? She says to her neighbors, “Come and see!”

In each instance, “come and see” is used as an invitation to discipleship; to follow when the future may not be clear; to give yourself over to God’s direction without the promise of a miracle; to personally step aside so that through you, God can be God and given glory for it. So when Jesus is told that Lazarus is sick, Jesus says to the disciples it is all so God can be glorified NOT the exalting of Lazarus. Jesus is acknowledging that God is God and even an illness cannot change that. But when Mary invites Jesus to Lazarus’ tomb using his own the words “come and see,” we see Jesus waiver as the enormity of what lays ahead of him is also revealed. And so our understanding grows as we read the very next words in the text: “Jesus wept.”

Jesus wept, and it is my wild and subjective guess that his tears were for the whole world, tears so full of anger and sadness that it was hard to tell where one left off and the other began. He wept tears for his friends Martha and Mary in their grief; tears over the loss of his friend Lazarus; tears about the frailty of life and the randomness with which it was snuffed out; tears that no one seemed to understand what he was about, much less believe it; tears over the enormity of what he had been given to do and how alone he was <in the doing of it.>. (Barbara Brown Taylor, “Without a Net,” Mixed Blessings)

In John’s gospel, there is not Garden of Gethsemane. The most we get is a few verses where Jesus says to his disciples just after the palm parade, “My soul is troubled. Shall I ask, ‘Father, save me from this hour?’ No! For this purpose I have come.” There is no wrestling with God; no asking for the cup to be passed; no sweating of blood; no sleeping disciples. No, in John’s gospel, what we have is Lazarus’ death. It is a foretelling of and confrontation with what lays ahead for Jesus.

So when Mary says to Jesus, “Come and see,” she extends to Jesus the same call to trust that has been extended to all the others. Jesus is invited to struggle with living in faithful

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obedience as he is personally confronted with suffering and death. Even though he is living water, even though he is the resurrection and the life, Jesus, at the tomb of Lazarus, is being called to seek no exemption from shame, betrayal, misunderstanding, pain and death. Fred Craddock helps us at this point. He writes:

Shall there be a thorny road for the flock but a primrose path for the shepherd? Shall the scouts sleep on the cold ground in the darkness of the woods while the scoutmaster relaxes in a nearby motel? If so, how can we pray in his name? How can we sing “What a Friend We Have in Jesus?” Are we to thrash about in the angry waves alone knowing he stands safe and dry on shore? How can we possibly walk out to the edge alone, all alone to feel the mist in our face and the fog in our throat if he was not perfected in suffering, tasting death for everyone? “Lord, come and see. Jesus wept.”

Standing in Bethany that day, the path becomes clear: discipleship demands the giving of his life in order for others to have Life eternal. If Jesus is for us and our salvation, then he cannot bypass the tomb. In this light, “Come and see” is not an offer of direction. It is an invitation for Jesus to trust God for a miracle when there is no evidence at hand that says God will act on his behalf. Recognizing that the whole drama of redemption rests in this brief exchange, Jesus is invited to his own dark tomb, and he weeps.

This table represents the call on our lives to “come and see.” As we receive the elements, ask yourself these Lenten questions:

- What miracle are you seeking?
- What faithfulness are you exemplifying in your discipleship?
- How are trust and obedience a part of your calling as a follower of Christ’s?
- In what ways do you need to allow God to be God and then step aside to confess that you are not?
- Will you “come and see”?

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