

Have you ever had someone ask you a question that felt just a little too big for an ordinary conversation? Not the easy ones like, “What did you do on the weekend?” or “What are you streaming these days?” You know what I mean, those casual questions we can answer on autopilot. What I’m talking about here are the kind of questions that take us by surprise and require us to let down our defenses a bit, like: *What are we hoping for in this season of our lives? What are we looking for underneath all the everyday to-do list stuff?*

Most of us don’t answer those questions directly. We deflect. We talk about the weather. We talk about our busy schedule. We reach for something manageable because the real answer, if we have even taken the time to think about it, feels unattainable, impractical, or just plain intimidating.

To me, it feels like that is exactly what happens in the gospel today. Jesus turns to two people, disciples of John, who have started walking behind and following him, and asks, “*Hey, you two back there...What are you looking for?*” And they respond with, “*Rabbi, where are you staying?*”

“Where are you staying????”

Wow...I mean, this is such a human moment. Think about it... Jesus asks about the state of their hearts, and they ask for an address? Talk about deflection.

But hold on, perhaps today we might hear their answer as actually holding something really honest. “*Where are you staying?*” might be another way of saying, “*Teacher, honestly, we really don’t know. But could we be near you long enough to figure it out?*” In other words, “*Could we just hang out with you a while until our courage catches up with our questions?*”

And Jesus, bless him, simply says to them, “*Come and see.*”

That word, “see”, has been following me around all this week. And it’s because I feel like I am living in a time that keeps trying to talk us out of trusting our own sight. We see something that troubles us, and someone says it isn’t that bad. We feel compassion rising up in us, and the world calls it unrealistic, sentimental, and a waste of energy. So, after a while, we begin to wonder, ...Did we really see what we think we saw? Are we allowed to feel what we’re feeling?

The powers and principalities of this age are very invested in shaping our vision. They don’t want us to believe what we see with our own eyes. They don’t want us to trust what our hearts recognize as true. And into that cacophony of voices, Jesus’ voice beckons us to “*Come and see*”. *Come close enough to see through my eyes. Come and stay with me long enough for your vision to be healed. Come and learn to see the world the way God sees it.*

Mary Oliver wrote that “*attention is the beginning of devotion.*” I love that, because attention is not some passive idea. Paying attention is a form of resistance. To pay attention to what is actually in front of us, rather than what we are told to see, is a deeply spiritual act. When Jesus says, “*Come and see,*” he is inviting the disciples, and us, into a holy practice. Into a sacrament of holy connection. Not just to be observers of his way of being, *but to let our way of seeing be re-formed.*

And when we begin to see through the eyes of Jesus, our picture of the world gets rearranged. We notice the people we overlooked. We hear truth in the stories we were told were exaggerations, or lies, or hoaxes. We feel commonality in places we have been taught to feel suspicion or contempt. Seeing our world with Jesus is about having our eyes healed.

I remember hearing a woman share that the hardest part of learning to live again was not changing her habits but learning to trust her own perceptions. For years, she had been told she was overreacting, too sensitive, reading things wrong. Healing began when someone finally said to her, “*I believe your story, and, what you see matters, what you feel matters.*” Wow, that kind of validation holds a deep gospel truth, whether it is spoken in a counselor’s office, a church basement, or across a kitchen table. And Jesus is saying the same thing to us. *Your seeing matters. Come and see with me.*

Friends, this is why *the powers that try to be all powerful* get so nervous around Christian seeing. Because once we have seen a hungry person as our sibling, it becomes very hard to accept a system that keeps them hungry. Once we have seen the earth as a living gift instead of some warehouse of precious resources to be plundered, it becomes very hard to shrug off its destruction. Once we have seen ourselves through the eyes of Christ, beloved and not disposable, it becomes very hard to live as if we and others don’t matter. The “powers” would rather we stay off-kilter. They would rather we stay numb. They would rather we keep scrolling past the tragedies and injustices that break God’s heart. *But Jesus keeps saying, “Don’t close your eyes, beloved. Come and see.”*

Don’t you wonder what those first disciples actually experienced that day when they followed him? What they saw? I wonder what spending those hours with Jesus really showed them? Can you just imagine spending an ordinary day with him? No miracles, no speeches, just real life unfolding around him. What would we notice if we watched the way he treated the person everyone else ignored, or the way he patiently listened, or the way he seemed to see more in people than they saw in themselves?

I suspect that by the end of that day, something in them had begun to fundamentally change. The streets would have looked the same, but they would have looked at the people in the streets differently. Faith doesn’t ask us to ignore reality; it opens our eyes to what is most true about God, about our neighbors, and about ourselves. Spending time with Jesus doesn’t change the scenery as much as it changes the eyes we use to see it.

Sometimes holy seeing begins with very ordinary things. A conversation that makes us feel less alone. A truth we finally admit about our own lives. A moment when we realize the person we were taught to fear is actually a lot like us. These are not small revelations. They are the awakenings of our hearts.

And this is where the gospel meets our present time. We are living in a season that keeps trying to separate us from our own experience. Don't believe the suffering we see; someone will explain it away. Don't believe the joy we feel; someone will call it unrealistic. Don't believe the love that widens our world; someone will warn us it's dangerous. But, dear people, Jesus never asks us to betray what our eyes and hearts know is true. He asks us to hold fast to it and to bring that truth with us into all of our living.

So, I keep circling back to his question. What are we looking for? What is it we are seeking right now? Maybe, it's a way to stay tender in a hard world. Maybe it's a faith that tells the truth about what we see instead of asking us to pretend. Whatever we are seeking, Jesus offers his life as a lens to visualize our own.

Atonemates, I pray today that we may have the courage to believe and proclaim what we see with our own eyes. And when Jesus asks us what we are looking for, may we be brave enough to follow him close enough to find out.

Amen.