

"Come and See"

Sermon by Lisa Crismore

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John 1:35-42

The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!" The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, "What are you looking for?" They said to him, "Rabbi" (which translated means teacher), "where are you staying?" "He said to them, "Come and see." They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. I was about four o'clock in the afternoon. One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated anointed). He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas" (which is translated Peter).

This past Friday my brother, Jason, and I went to see the new movie, "Dolittle". Now despite the bad reviews, I thought it was up lifting and whimsical. No, I don't think this remake of the classic "Dr. Dolittle" will be up for any Oscars next year but it was entertaining. As the movie unfolds, we find a young boy named Tommy Stubbins drawn to Dr. John Dolittle. There is this magnetism that pulls this young man to follow the doctor, especially after he finds that he can indeed talk to animals. They begin to embark on an amazing adventure together.

This magnetism is similar to what the disciples feel when John the Baptist announces that Jesus is the "Lamb of God". The disciples have followed this man, John, in the wilderness, proclaiming that this special person is coming. This man is like no other human because he is also of the divine. John is saying here is the Messiah, the one who has been sent to save the world from sin. It is no wonder that this gets the attention of the John's disciples and draws their attention to follow Jesus.

Do they really have any idea who they are following and what lies ahead of them? It is Jesus who asks them, "What are you looking for?" The disciples really don't answer him. I wonder if they don't answer him because they really don't know what they are looking for. What is that we are looking for when we go to follow Jesus? Do we know? Is it answers to prayer? Is it strength to get through the day? Is it directions on how to be the best disciple that we can be? What is it that we are looking for when we go to follow Jesus?

As we find ourselves on this second Sunday after epiphany, one commentator says, "Epiphany is about God's self-revelation in the incarnation of Christ. In this story we see that the who and the why of life are connected. Jesus' missional purpose as the Lamb of God is connected to who he is as Son of God, and vice versa. We come to understand that identity is not primarily an egocentric discovery but a missional revelation. We are connected to Someone much bigger than us, and our lives take on meaning as we engage in God's mission. We find our true epiphany when we find our place in God's world." (Connections – Year A, Volume 1; by Mark Abbott; 2019; Westminster John Knox Press; p. 191)

It is no wonder then that the disciples come back with another question, "Where are you staying, Jesus?" Jesus answers, "Come and see." They go to find their place with Jesus when they find where Jesus is staying. They stay with the Rabbi – the teacher for the day. Then come the early evening around 4 o'clock, one of the disciples, Andrew, decides to go to his brother, Simon, and tells him that Jesus is the Messiah... the Anointed one.

When Jesus meets Simon, he renames him as Cephas, which is translated as Peter. This encounter changes the lives of the disciples so much so that Simon's name is changed to Peter. Their identity is transformed when they decide to follow Jesus.

Andrew and Simon's lives are changed forever. They have been called to be Jesus' disciples. As one commentator puts it, "this was a process of discovering their respective identities. For each of them their individual sense of identity and meaning was inextricably tied to a purpose, a calling, a mission. Each of them was part of something much bigger than themselves, because they were connected to someone much bigger. For both of them, life became more than the self." (Connections - Year A, Volume 1; by Mark Abbott; 2019; Westminster John Knox Press; p. 191)

When you are called to be Christ disciples, how does your life change? What is it that we see when we come to serve the Lamb of God on a day to day basis? How do our identities change? What are our new names?

We receive titles like deacon, elder, trustee, Presbyterian Women, pastor, treasurer, choir member, band member, church member, Christian. I had a pastor ask everyone during his sermon to raise their hand if they were a pastor. No one raised their hand. He said that we were all called to be pastors and share the Word of God with everyone we encountered be it with our words and/or our actions.

When we come and see what Jesus is calling us to be and do, we are transformed because just like Andrew and Peter it becomes more than the self. We become the Body of Christ.

This call, mission and connection to Christ can be a powerful thing. We hear from our youth after they return from their mission trip. We hear from our session members when Frank asked them to share at the end of their term what it was like to serve God in this way. We hear from our confirmands when they share their faith statements with the session. We hear it when people join the church. We hear it when the PW gives their annual award. We hear it when we eulogize a saint when we celebrate their service of the resurrection.

I bet we could all share how our lives have been impacted by God when we are called to serve others in numerous ways. It is no doubt that it can be a true blessing. And yet, there are times when it can be challenging.

One of the seminary students who went on to be a pastor, Beau Brown just published a book "No More Churches." Beau is this beautiful, sensitive, justice minded, loving, gifted, pastoral guy, who basically got beat up by the church. His book is about the true story of a pastor who experiences burnout so much so that he decides to leave the profession.

I give Beau a lot of credit. He is honest. He has dealt with depression and low self-esteem. He has been pretty battered by the church, which professes to love everyone. Now, I have not read his books only excerpts. He has posted stories from the book on his Facebook page so I have a snapshot of what he shares in the book, which came out on the market Christmas day.

What I appreciate about Beau, who was my seminary liaison student when I first served on the Commission for Preparation of Ministry several years ago, is he speaks from the heart. Through all the heartache, he can still share the joy found in the church.

He shares openly about the brutal years of him and his wife desperately trying to get pregnant. They went through numerous infertility treatments but came up short. Finally, they decided to adopt a child. As soon as they began to explore this path, they found themselves with twin babies - a boy and a girl. The church during this time showered them with love, clothing, meals,

babysitting, diapers and anything and everything first time parents need. Those are the fond memories as a pastor, which he holds onto in the past.

His book is about finding hope and healing when you experience burnout and hurt in the church. If we back up a few verses in our scripture today, we hear the Gospel of John's version of Jesus' baptism. It is retold by John the Baptist as he shares his experience of what happened when this event occurred. John testifies that the Spirit descended on Jesus like a dove. This was the sign for John that Jesus was the Son of God and that Jesus comes to baptize with the Holy Spirit.

It is God's Spirit that is given to each and everyone of us. When we are called to go and serve; when we are transformed in this renaming; when we are sent out to serve Christ and not ourselves, it is the Spirit, who will go with us, seeing us through the peaks and the valleys. It is the Spirit that heals the broken and rejoices with the wholeness of life. Thanks be to God for transforming us when we are called to be Christ disciples and giving us the Spirit to be with us when we come and see. Amen.