

“Come and See”

John 1:35-51

January 20, 2008

We begin this morning at the end of the narrative regarding John the Baptist’s ministry. John has declared, “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” Jesus has entered the scene.

Read John 1:35-51

I. “Come and see” for a variety of reasons

This year, you are going to hear a lot about evangelism; that is, going out and inviting others to come and see. But saying “evangelism” to Presbyterians is often like asking them to wet their fingers and stick them in electric sockets. They know they would get a charge out of it, but do not like the picture of their hair standing on end.

Last week, Nicasio emphasized how we are the “church militant,” charged with the responsibility of “going and making disciples.” We are all soldiers commissioned to go forth and win disciples for our Lord. That imagery scares us because we do not want to be confrontational, we do not want to seem like “Jesus freaks,” we want to be nice. We are uncomfortable with the idea of “imposing” our beliefs on others, uncomfortable that someone will ask us a question we think we should probably know, or uncomfortable that we will offend someone.

But note how the gospel describes the development of the first disciples. They were attracted to Jesus for a variety of reasons. The first two went to Jesus because John the Baptist pointed towards him. Those were Andrew and – though un-named – probably John the writer of the gospel. They were following the Baptist and he directed their attention towards Jesus.

Then, Andrew went to Simon Peter and said, “We have found the Messiah.” Seeing how he acts in the remainder of the gospels, we have to wonder if Simon’s first response was, “I did not know the Messiah was lost...” Nonetheless, Simon was willing to go with Andrew to see Jesus. During that meeting, Jesus looked at him and gave him the nickname, “The Rock,” that is, Peter.

The next day Jesus “found” Philip; this is, he went looking for him. Jesus tracked him down and said to him, “Follow me.”

Finally, Philip found Nathanael and told him about Jesus. Nathanael is more skeptical than we would even attribute to Peter and asks the sarcastic question, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Nathanael was more difficult to convince to come and see, but is overwhelmed when Jesus says, “I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.”

In these few verses, there are four different ways that disciples came to follow Jesus. The good news is shared in many ways. But the point is: the good news is shared.

The closest thing we have to the early church development of evangelists and disciples is the Apple computer. In my office I have a book entitled, “The Cult of Mac.”

This history of the Mac reads like a cult. This past week was the big MacWorld convention, where the past year’s activity is reviewed and sales are celebrated. The upcoming products are announced. Steve Jobs makes the keynote address – and the faithful gather with great anticipation for this event. Jobs’ every move, every word, every inflection is analyzed and weighed. It is often described as a “religious experience.”

Mac people are notorious early adopters. As soon as Mac puts out a product, they have to have it, they have to use it, they have to tell you how cool it is and how much you need to have one, too. This has been going on for a number of years; some of the stories of the devotion have become part of the legend and lore of the Mac. For example, there’s the guy who had his hair cut and shaved in the design of the Apple logo. When Apple was struggling in the mid-1990’s, Mac-fanatics would go to the local Comp-USA stores to *volunteer* their time to convince other people to buy Macs.

I can tell you as a Mac fan, I have been guilty of making people watch the advertisements, the “Hi, I’m a Mac,” and the other guy, “Hi, I’m a PC.” Mac people think those ads are hilarious. PC people – not so much. Yet, I have taken more than a little pleasure inflicting those ads on PC folks.

Why do people do this? Because they earnestly believe and are convicted that they have found a good thing and they need to share it with others. They can’t help themselves – they need to go out and share what they have found. The goodness of the message outweighs any consideration of making a fool of themselves, the goodness of the message outweighs any thought of offending someone else, the goodness of the message is something to share and not be kept to themselves.

After last week’s service, how many of you talked with each other about Nicasio’s message and the service? My sense is that quite a few of you did. But the real question is, how many of you told someone who is NOT a part of Chula Vista Presbyterian Church about the service?

Being an evangelist for Jesus means sharing with others. That is so easy to say, but taking the first step can be so hard to do.

This feeling exists for pastors as well as church members. When the wildfires came in 2003, Westminster in Escondido became a hub for a lot of community activity. We were asked to host a bloodmobile. So, I went out to the parking lot to try to do some logistical planning: where is the most level spot, where could people park, how would the traffic move – you know, all the skills we were taught in seminary. I took our custodian, Denny; and our sound guy who happened to be on campus, also named Denny. So, the Denny’s and I were walking around and we come across a beat up old Buick with two guys sitting in it. We walked around them and continued our conversation.

When we came back around, the driver's side window was rolled down. For a moment, I thought something was on fire inside the car because there was so much cigarette smoke coming out. But then, the man in the driver's side seat called out to us, "Is there a pastor here?"

My first reaction was to tell them about Jim Rauch being in the office inside, but the Denny's turned on me and both were pointing in my direction. "Cowards," I muttered under my breath, loud enough for them to hear.

So, I walked over to the car. The Denny's took off for the office to finish up the details for the bloodmobile. And I began talking to the two guys.

For anyone who has worked around a church office, meetings like this are not uncommon, but always different. Usually, we are on our guard for people who are trying to scam money. There are a variety of stories – but they tend to be fantastic and imaginative.

Here, however, the man sitting in the passenger seat was actively sobbing. The man in the driver seat says to me, "We have screwed things up so bad. Both of us have lost our families and jobs because of drinking and doing stupid things. We want to start again. We know that we need Jesus; can you help us? What do we do?"

It was kind of hard for me to miss the door open in front of me. I brought them into the sanctuary and sat down near the chancel area. They poured out their hearts, how they had sinned and spun down until their lives were a disaster. They wanted to repent. So together, we confessed to God, and I led them in the sinner's prayer, "Lord Jesus Christ," they repeated, "Son of God," "have mercy on me, a sinner." They prayed that Jesus wash them clean of their sin, that he would help them walk in a new way as his disciples, that he would give them confidence and assurance of the hope of their salvation in him. At the end of the time together, they said, "Now what? What do we do?" I invited them to come to Westminster – but more importantly, if not Westminster, that they go somewhere that they could be surrounded by Christians who would encourage them in their new walk.

How many angels rejoiced that day when those lost sheep came home? How many other lost sheep are all around here? How can God use you and me to help bring them home?

In short, we need to know and believe that what we have is good news for sinners.

II. Jesus asks, "What are you looking for?"

Jesus' first words in the gospel are, "What are you looking for?" It is sometimes translated, "What do you want?" It was the same question I was asking the men in the car. "What are you looking for?"

Are you prepared for Jesus' question, "What are you looking for?" That question really startles us because, if you are like me, you have the expectation that Jesus is just going to be happy that we have shown up.

Jesus' question "what are you looking for" is a question of expectation – and when we come to church, we are approaching Jesus.

Imagine if being a disciple was a job, and Jesus was the interviewer, how would you answer the question, "Why do you want this job?"

We want to be disciples because we want to see Jesus. There is something special about Jesus. Our eyes are drawn to him. Look at the titles or descriptions that are in this passage. John the Baptist declares that Jesus is, "the Lamb of God." Andrew and John call Jesus, "Rabbi," or "Teacher." Andrew tells Simon, "we have found the Messiah." Philip tells Nathanael, "We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote." Nathanael declares, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" Jesus says of himself, "You will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

They had expectations that Jesus was someone very special. They were correct; though they did not really understand *how* Jesus would express that special-ness – through vulnerability, obedience, and an un-waivering commitment to the mission for which he was sent.

"What are you looking for?" We want to see Jesus because we want to see our hero, our savior.

We want to be disciples because we want to be transformed by Jesus. We know that we are in trouble. Like the guys in the car, we know that our lives are not what they are supposed to be. We know that we have stumbled, we have turned our back on God, that we have done things we sure wish we had not done, we have failed to do things we really wish we had done.

The reality is that we know that we are accountable for our lives. We like to be humble about our achievements and the ways we have done good things; "oh, go on, anyone would have done that..." Yet there are the other things we want to keep hidden in the dark. We cannot fix things ourselves. We need help. We need someone to save us.

Change does not come easy. Spiritual growth is like a diet. Without discipline, without help, without someone walking alongside, it is difficult to sustain for any period of time. It is difficult to give up the things that we have become accustomed to carrying – whether it be weight or the weight of sin.

We go to Jesus because we know he is able. We know this because of the testimony of Scripture and because of the testimony of other people we know whose lives have been changed. We do not go blindly; we go with the knowledge and hope that Jesus is who he says he is.

"What are you looking for?" We want to see Jesus because only he can make us clean, only he can restore to us the righteousness that we have lost because of sin.

We want to be disciples because we want to bear witness to how we have been transformed by Jesus. Just as we have been moved because of the witness of others to us, we come because

we want to be encouraging to others. Our gathering together celebrates – yes, celebrates – what Jesus has done in our lives.

Each one of you has a faith story.

For some, it is a lifetime of faithfulness, a lifetime of knowing Jesus and following him. For you, the faith story is one of adventure, of wonder, of things that have happened because of the grace of God.

For others, your faith has been one of searching, questioning, struggling, of fits and starts. Through disasters, through achievements, through opportunities, through losses – through all of those things your understanding of who God is and how God’s grace has come to you is deep.

For some others, faith is a new thing. You know where you were before you accepted Jesus as your Lord and Savior. Only now, you begin to see your past life with a different perspective; you have begun to see how God was at work drawing you unto himself.

And some of you, I dare suggest here today, are here without ever knowing or receiving Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. If that is your situation, I encourage you to pray – pray that God would convict your heart, allow you to seek his face, to receive his grace, and to enter into his salvation.

No matter where you are, together we need to give voice to those stories. I know you have them because you tell them to me.

It reminds me of sitting on planes when I was traveling a lot. As soon as people found out I was a Presbyterian minister, they would want to tell me about their lives, their church, the way that God has been good to them. It was remarkable how people could tell their stories with theological language. I appreciate that and I have been encouraged by those stories. However, the problem is that I suspect that I am the only person they are telling those stories in that way; and telling me does not count as evangelism – I already believe.

We need to start telling each other so that we can share with others who are not here. We need to share those with each other – practicing telling the accounts of our lives with eyes open to see how God has moved in them.

Conclusion

Teacher, where are you staying? Come and see.

Brother, we have found the Messiah! Come and see.

Friend, we have found him about whom Moses wrote in the law and also the prophets wrote. Come and see!

Being a disciple of Jesus means three things: knowing that you have found the Savior, rejoicing because you have been saved, and sharing that good news with others – inviting them to “come and see” Jesus.

Why do this? Because we earnestly believe we have found a good thing and we need to share it with others. The goodness of the message outweighs any consideration of making a fool of ourselves, the goodness of the message outweighs any thought of offending someone else, the goodness of the message is something to share and not be kept to ourselves.

“Come and see.”

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

8:45 prayer and offering

10:00 offering