

“Come and See”

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January 16, 2011

John 1:29-42

Jesus chose not to stay in heaven but came to our neighborhood to become one of us. That’s the great event of Christmas.....we call this mystery of God becoming human.... *incarnation* and we call Jesus *Emmanuel* “*God with us.*” In the Prologue to the Gospel of John we read, “*And the Word became flesh and lived among us*” which Eugene Peterson paraphrases, in The Message, “*The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood.*” Jesus then symbolizes his unity with us humans by descending into the waters of baptism. As Jesus came out of the water a voice from heaven declared, “*You are my Beloved with whom I am well pleased.*”

John the Baptist seems to have recognized this divine quality of Jesus from the beginning. It seems that faith came easily to John the Baptist. We see it again in the Gospel of John, our lectionary reading for this Sunday.

Read John 1:29-42

²⁹*The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!*
³⁰*This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.’* ³¹*I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel.”* ³²*And John testified, “I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him.* ³³*I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’* ³⁴*And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God.”* ³⁵*The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples,* ³⁶*and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, “Look, here is the Lamb of God!”*

³⁷*The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus.*
³⁸*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?" ³⁹ *He said to them, "Come and see." They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon.* ⁴⁰ *One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother.* ⁴¹ *He first found his brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated Anointed).* ⁴² *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). The Word of the Lord..... Thanks be to God!*

It seems that faith came effortlessly to John the Baptist. In all the Gospel accounts John easily recognizes Jesus for who he is..... ***"Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!....."*** ³² *And John testified, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him....."* ³⁴ *And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God."* ³⁵ *The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples,³⁶ and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!"* John knows that he knows....absolutely, unequivocally knows that Jesus is the Messiah....the Savior for which the world has waited.

Because John was certain of his understanding of Jesus, he unwaveringly witnessed to Jesus as the Lamb of God and the Lord of all life. John's confident faith and passion challenged the status quo which cost him his life. I have no doubt that as the ax came down on John's neck he remained steadfast in his faith. I am glad that John the Baptist was so sure of his faith. I am glad John the Baptist was prophetic in his message to rich and poor alike. I am glad John the Baptist had no doubts about his faith in Jesus.

I envy people who know, without a shadow of a doubt that they have "found" Jesus. I envy people who unequivocally know that they are saved, that God is in charge, that all is right with their world. I envy people who seem to always have a peaceful sense of God's presence and there seems to be nothing that can shake their faith. Some people seem to be as sure of their faith as John the Baptist but I am not one of them. Maybe you are. If so, I am happy for you!

Don't get me wrong. I believe but my faith sometimes has weak knees. It's like that old saying, "I believe, help my unbelief"

Sometimes my faith is shaken by personal disappointment and other times my faith seems compromised by events in the world. I look to the heavens and wonder out loud to God, "What's up with a mentally disturbed gunman killing six people and wounding 13 others in Tucson, Arizona? Why?" I would imagine many of us wonder about that oft repeated question "Where is God in this?" Especially when we begin to hear about the victims and learn that one of them was a nine year old girl by the name of Christina Taylor Green, who was born on 9/11/2001....a little girl who sensed that her birth date was some type of a calling for her to work for peace and harmony in the world. Go figure! But that's the problem, I can't figure it out....I can't make sense of it....it doesn't fit nicely with my faith in a loving and life giving God. So, I stand before God and wonder out loud to God, "What's up with the killing of Christina Taylor Green?"

Frederick Buechner, novelist and preacher, has this to say about the role of uncertainty and ambiguity in the journey of faith:

"If you tell me Christian commitment is a kind of thing that has happened to you once and for all like some kind of spiritual plastic surgery, I say...you're either pulling the wool over your own eyes or trying to pull it over mine. Every morning you should wake up in you bed and ask yourself: "Can I believe it all again today?" No, better still, don't ask it till after you've read The New York Times, till after you've studied that daily record of the world's brokenness and corruption, which should always stand side by side with your Bible. Then ask yourself if you can believe in the Gospel of Jesus Christ again for that particular day. If you answer is always Yes, then you probably don't know what believing means. At least five times out of ten the answer should be NO...The No is what proves you're human in case you should ever doubt it." (Soul Survivor, by Philip Yancey, p. 263-264)

Fortunately our Gospel reading today reveals two kinds of faith experiences. John the Baptist's "I-found-it-that-settles-that" certain kind of faith and a messier, meandering, less-certain kind of faith. I believe God is equally the author of both faith experiences but my hunch is that most of us are of the less certain kind of faith.

In the second part of our Gospel we see two of John the Baptist's disciples hear him call Jesus "the Lamb of God." Their ears perk up because they are well aware of the language of the sacrificial lamb in their Hebrew tradition and *curiosity* beckons them to learn more. *Curiosity*, not bedrock commitment, prompted these two men to follow Jesus.

When these curious men approach Jesus, he doesn't quiz them, scare them, shame them, push them away or try to manipulate them. He simply meets them with a simple but profound question, "***What are you looking for?***" Sensing Jesus' approachability, Andrew and his friend moved a little closer and asked Jesus, "***Where are you staying?***" This question initiated a life-long relationship between Jesus and the two men. Jesus simply responds, "***Come and see.***" These inquisitive men go and see, and end up staying with Jesus all day which turned into a staying-with-Jesus for the rest of their lives.

It's been said that we can see God in a sunset, a rainbow, a newborn baby, a child playing, a walk through the woods, a family sharing a moment of laughter or a musician giving a superlative performance. It's true, we can see God in these beautiful gifts of daily life.

But let's not stop there. When Jesus invited his followers to "come and see" he was inviting them not only into the pleasant experiences of life but also into the most painful and desperate situations of life...those circumstances of life that seem to be barren of life altogether. Jesus invites us to come and see his light shine in the darkness.

Come and see.... Jesus touching and healing a Leper
 Come and see.... Jesus hanging out with the "wrong kind of people"
 Come and see.... Jesus defending a woman caught in the act of adultery
 Come and see.... Jesus feeding the hungry
 Come and see....Jesus calming a storm
 Come and see.... Jesus bringing hope to a grieving mother

Come and see.... Jesus getting angry at the religious establishment
Come and see.... Jesus taking up the towel and wash basin of a servant to wash his students' feet
Come and see.... Jesus taking up his cross and dying for a broken world

On December 30, 2000, I had the opportunity to officiate at the wedding of Chris and Erin Beckman right here at Fairmont Presbyterian Church. It was a beautiful wedding with vows of faithfulness, love and commitment being shared by this young couple. Erin and Chris moved to South Carolina and on with their lives. Then about a year and a half ago I received a call from Erin telling me that her husband, a former High School wrestler, Army soldier, motorcycle riding, fun-loving, grab all the gusto you can kind of a man, had been diagnosed with Lou Gehrig's disease (ALS) in 2006. Erin had called to ask if it would be possible to have Chris' memorial service here at Fairmont. I, of course, agreed. Then a month or so ago Erin called to let me know they had moved back to Oakwood and I went over to visit them. I had a wonderful visit with Erin and then we both went into Chris' room where I saw Chris lying in bed, unable to speak and now weighing only about 70 pounds. In spite of his weekend condition, as I greeted him he responded with a faint smile. Erin told me that she and Chris, early on, committed to renewing their wedding vows every ten years and she asked if I would come back on December 30th to do just that. I, of course, agreed. During that visit I witnessed the Light shining in spite of the darkness of that horrific disease ALS.

On December 30th we gathered in Chris' room and, as Erin lay by Chris, she shared how much she loved being Chris' wife, how thankful she was for their ten years and the joy of life together shared with their two daughters. I read the same vows that Chris and Erin had affirmed exactly ten years earlier. How they would be loving and faithful husband and wife; in plenty and want; in joy and in sorrow; in sickness and in health; as long as they both shall live. I confirmed that they had fulfilled their vows in extraordinary fashion and then offered a prayer of thanksgiving for their marriage and life together. During our visit I witnessed the Light shining in spite of the darkness of that horrific disease ALS.

A few days later I was called to Hospice because Chris had died at age 38. As I entered Chris' hospice room I found Erin, their two daughters, Morgan and Mackenzie, and two of Erin's friends, Lisa and Carrie. As we prayed, cried, laughed, and said good-bye to Chris I sensed the presence of the One who promised, "I will be with you always." I witnessed the Light shining in spite of the presence of death.

Since then I have had the privilege of being with Erin, her family and friends several times and each time we marveled at the little blessings that have brought life, love and hope along the way. This past Friday we gathered once again here at Fairmont to celebrate Chris' life and the resurrection hope we have in Jesus Christ. It was a marvelous celebration of life and, again, we witnessed the Light shining in darkness.

As I reflect on this series of events it's almost as if Jesus was inviting all of us who knew Chris and Erin to come and see how he would bring life into a very desperate situation. Jesus said come and see me in an Army Chaplain who befriended Chris and Erin and baptized their daughters. Come and see me in Willie and Rodney and other motorcycle friends of Chris and Erin who brought comfort and help. Come and see me in Chris' smile, and his determination to live life to the fullest even while trapped in a body that wouldn't move. Come and see me through Nadine's poem written in honor of Chris. Come and see me in Morgan and Mackenzie as they snuggle up to their father and mother. Come and see me through so many good friends like Carrie, Lisa and Tracey, as well as family members who take care of life's details along with hugs of comfort and assurance. Come and see me in affirming of marriage vows on the tenth anniversary. Come and see me in the surprising comfort and joy in the quiet place of the heart through prayer, private thoughts and that peace that passes understanding. The Light shines in the darkness and the darkness will never overcome Christ's Light.

Yes, we often see God's face in the rainbow but remember Jesus invites us to come see God's face in the midst of uncertainty and darkness. For Jesus' promise holds true this day, ***"I am with you always, to the end of the age."***

Amen

