

Come and See

2nd Sunday after Epiphany, Jan. 16, 2011

John 1:29-35, I Corinthians 1:1-9

In the Church Year, this is the second Sunday of Epiphany. Epiphany means “manifestation”. We’ve been celebrating the making manifest of our Lord, the revelation, if you will, of Jesus, and what he means. The gospel lesson today continues on that theme. If you listened carefully, you heard, not only that Jesus is being made manifest in this passage, but also that PEOPLE are the one’s doing the revealing. Let’s look more closely at three vignettes to see what we can learn from them.

First Vignette: “There he is! There’s the one you’ve been looking for, there’s the Lamb of God!”

It is mid afternoon. The sun is shining brightly. John and his disciples are standing by the Jordan, and they can hear the water swishing and gurgling over the rocks. The palm trees stand sturdy and strong sending their graceful fronds and dancing leaves into the sky like a shimmering fountain.

John has just been telling them, “I’ve seen the one who can heal the broken world, the one who can save us from our sinful natures. I’ve seen the very son of god.” Then John points, “There he is! There is the Lamb of God!” Then with a smile and a nod to John they turn and follow Jesus.

This scene tells us almost as much about John as it does about Jesus. Yes, John tells his two disciples marvelous things about Jesus, but it’s all about Jesus, not about John. John is not concerned about self-congratulation or self-aggrandizement. John is only concerned that people know Jesus. Later in this gospel he says, “He must increase, but I must decrease.” He appears to be perfectly happy that his two disciples walk away from him to follow Jesus.

Can we do that? Can we be more concerned that people come to know Jesus than about how embarrassed we’d be speaking about him? Can we be more eager that they learn about him than that we build up our membership?

Second vignette. As the two disciples follow He turns and looks at them. He doesn’t ask their names; he doesn’t greet them. He gets right to the point. “What are you looking for?” he asks. They look at one another. What are they looking for? For the one who can give life meaning, the one who can help them find God? Their response doesn’t seem to answer his question. They ask a question of their own. “Where are you staying? Where can we find you?” He smiles and responds “Come and see.” Come and see! What an invitation!

I love the immediacy of this. Jesus doesn't stop and give them directions. He doesn't say, "I can meet you there next Saturday. He says, in effect, "there's no time like the present. If you're ready to spend time with me, I'm ready, too." Whenever we turn to him, he always has time for us. The disciples stay with Jesus the rest of the day--they spent time with him--they get to know him. They learn from their own experience who he is.

Time with Jesus is crucial if we're to help Jesus become manifest. We can't show him to the world, we can't share him, if we don't know him. Through spending time with Jesus, alone in our devotions and prayers, and together in worship and study, we not only get to know him better, we also may even begin to want to tell others about him.

Third vignette: One of these disciples is Andrew. Andrew can't wait; the very next day he goes looking for his brother Simon. Can you imagine the excitement in his voice when he says, "We have found the Messiah, Peter! We've found the one we were looking for, the one we've been waiting for. Come and see." And he brings Simon to Jesus. And Jesus changes Simon's name to Peter.

Notice that Andrew goes not to a stranger, but to his brother. And Peter is the kind of person who has talked a lot to Andrew. Andrew listened a lot to Peter's hope and dreams before he comes with his news. Notice, too, that Andrew doesn't wait until he's known Jesus a long time. He doesn't wait until he's gone through seminary or he's an expert in evangelism. Andrew doesn't tell Simon the four spiritual laws. He doesn't tell him what a sinner he is, or that he is going to hell. He just gives him the good news that they'd found the Messiah and brings Peter to meet him.

We find out later that Andrew is not much of a leader, not much of a speaker, but he is good at introducing people to Jesus. Later, when Jesus wants to feed 5000 people, Andrew is the one who introduces Jesus to a little boy who has five loaves and two fish. Still later, when some Greeks want to meet Jesus, Philip takes them to Andrew, and together they take them to Jesus. Andrew is just an ordinary guy. One of the disciples, yes, but not one of the three in the inner circle. There's no record that he ever preaches a sermon. Of course Peter preaches many sermons, to much success. In his very first sermon 3000 people come to Jesus. Yet it is Andrew, plain, friendly, ordinary Andrew, who brings Peter to Jesus. .

What about us? Can we do what Andrew did? I know it's not our favorite thing to do. I know that you can quote Matthew 5:16 to me. Pastor Sylvia, "It says right here, 'Let your light so shine... that people will see your GOOD WORKS and glorify your Father in Heaven.' Pastor, don't you think what we do speaks louder than what we say?" I know most of you would prefer to work in a soup kitchen for a whole week, or build a whole Habitat House, rather than tell

someone about Jesus. But it's important both to serve and to speak. I think it's fitting that Andrew became the patron saint of Scotland, the home of Presbyterians. If we Presbyterians are ever to do evangelism, we'll adopt Andrew's friendly, non-confrontive style. Do you remember the hymn that goes "Though you cannot preach like Peter, though you cannot pray like Paul, You can tell the love of Jesus, You can tell he died for all." That's what Andrew did. That's what we can do.

Why is this so hard for us? Are we Presbyterian just not excited about our faith? Years ago, when the Harry Potter books first came out, our granddaughters, with great exuberance, told us about them. "You've just got to read the books," they said, "You've just got to meet Harry and Hermione and Ron." They loaned us the first book on tape and, that very day driving home, we listened, and we became Harry fans, too. I'm sure you have told friends about a book you read, or a movie you saw, or a trip you took, urging your friends to share your joy, your delight.

Now I have to admit I'm not great at this either. This may surprise you, because I get up here and preach every Sunday morning. You have to remember here I'm in a sense preaching to the choir—I'm preaching to committed Christians, or at least to people who care enough to come here and listen. Brining up the subject with a friend or family member or acquaintance is an entirely different matter.

Once, once in my life I had someone ask me, "How do I become a Christian?" At the time I was a campus minister at U.C. Riverside. Beth made an appointment with me and asked me that question. I told her it was simple; she just needed to accept Jesus as her savior. We prayed together and I told her she needed to become part of a church. She chose to join Magnolia Presbyterian Church and I had the joy of getting to know her and watching her grow in the faith. I even had the privilege of performing her wedding. Beth came to me that day because of a friend. She met this friend during her year of study in Germany. During that year her friend had talked with Beth about her faith. I'm sure her friend prayed for her as well. Her friend may not even have known at the time that the seed she planted was taking root. Can we be like that friend?

While I was working on this sermon I came across a question that may help us. If we can answer this question maybe we'll have something to say. Here's the question. "What good news about Jesus have you experienced that you can share with others?" I'm sure many answers can be given to that question. These are the things that come to me. When I fail or fall short, or make a mess of things, I still know that Jesus loves me anyway, and I've sometimes felt a great peace wash over me because of that. Also when I look back on my life I can see that God has been at work for good. I've seen how the puzzle pieces of my life have fallen into place. Finally, I have found in the church, in the community of faith—I have found among you-- acceptance and affirmation and love. In other

words, in the church, in the community of faith, among you, I have encountered Christ.

So, if you absolutely CANNOT speak about what Jesus means to you, perhaps you can say to someone, "Come to our church; come and see," and perhaps they will find, as I have found, that Christ is here.

Now it is late morning. The palm trees outside stand sturdy and strong, sending their graceful fronds and dancing leaves against the sky. And Jesus asks us--Whom are you looking for? How will we answer him?

Will we follow him and stay with him?

Will we be transformed and healed so we can go and out say to others "Come and see?"