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St. Timothy's Episcopal Church
January 20, 2020

Epiphany II: Isaiah 49:1-7; Psalm 40:1-10; 1 Corinthians 1:1-9; John 1:29-41

Title: Come and See.

The Gospel of John ends much as it begins. And, therefore, it begins much as it ends. Let us see how this might be true.

In the story taken from the Gospel this morning we find John the Baptist beginning to wind down his ministry. He is like a man who has been in a furious race. Or as one who has been single-mindedly focused on some given task. And now the task is complete. The race is won. The goal is accomplished. He can now imagine maybe relaxing a little – retirement we would call it today.

And what had John's vocation been? John's calling had been to keep a sharp eye out for the one who was to come. And upon recognizing him, he had announced that the Lamb of God was now among us and he has a name. And that name is Jesus. John's job was over. Jesus's job was about to begin.

Like Jesus, John had disciples who followed him, and drew from him, and learned from him. And it was to two of these disciples, Andrew and an unnamed disciple, that John first guided toward Jesus, Messiah, the Lamb of God.

The two disciples waste no time. They have learned their lesson well. That is, that John was not himself Messiah but rather was one who would *point to* the Messiah of whom the prophets had foretold.

So, these two disciples rush off then to catch up with Jesus. And Jesus sensing their approach turns and says, "What are you looking for?" And their somewhat unresponsive, maybe even puzzling response, is to ask a question of Jesus. They say to Jesus, "Where are you staying."

Now to our ears to respond to Jesus' question with the question, "Where are you staying,?" probably seems a little oblique. It helps to know that many scholars have suggested that the disciples most likely were not so much inquiring of Jesus as to his housing arrangements as they were asking implied questions

like, "Where is it that you meet with your disciples? Where is it that you teach and converse with those who earnestly seek to learn from you? How do we get close to you? And what message do you have for us? What is there to learn from you Jesus of Nazareth?"

These are the questions behind or maybe beyond the question the disciples asked of Jesus: Where are you staying? In today's vernacular, it might not so much be, "Where are you staying?" as "Where are you coming from?"

But the question they ask is: Where are you straying? And Jesus' reply is an invitation: He says, "COME AND SEE."

Jesus' life is an invitation to COME AND SEE. Come and see what God intended for you, and for me, and for creation.

Shepherds were tending their flocks in the field and received an announcement from a heavenly chorus about the birth of the Christ child. And their response was, "LET US GO SEE this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." They accepted, if you will, the invitation to 'come and see.'

Wise men from the east see a star, and ask themselves, "What does this mean? Let us follow this sign and let us go SEE where it leads." They were accepting of the invitation to 'come and see.'

In the lesson from the Old Testament this morning, the prophet Isaiah is having a little pity-party. He's been diligent in carrying out his call. And yet, he sees so little results that he despairs. And what does God say to Isaiah in his despair? God says, "Isaiah COME AND SEE. Come and see a broader vision. You are not only to be a light to Israel, you are to be a light to the nations and to the whole world so that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth."

You can almost see Isaiah saying, "Oh. I see."

Tomorrow is a national holiday in honor of Martin Luther King Junior's birthday. But more importantly for our purposes here today, tomorrow is a day on the Episcopal Christian calendar in which we celebrate the life of Martin Luther King, Jr.

King is not on the calendar because he was necessarily loved, nor because everyone either agreed with or even understood him.

My friends, Martin Luther King is on the Christian calendar because he was faithful to his call – faithful to a call much broader than the confines the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church.

He's on our calendar of *Holy Women, Holy Men: Celebrating the Saints* because, for like the prophet Isaiah, he invited a nation to come and see a broader vision – one based on love of neighbor and fundamental justice for all.

When accused of meddling in affairs that were outside of his geographical base, King's response was that -- like the Apostle Paul who also was compelled to carry the gospel of freedom beyond the confines of his home town -- he would say, "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

And King is on the calendar because he had a dream. And not just any dream. But a dream ground into the fabric of the Christian faith. A dream that one day "justice could roll down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream," a phrase King borrowed from the prophet Amos.¹

A dream that his people like the Israelites who had been loosed from the bondage of slavery in Egypt would likewise be loosed from the bondage of what he referred to as the "sweltering heat of injustice and oppression."

A dream that all God's children, sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics could sit down and join hands around the table of brotherhood.

A dream that the then Governor of Alabama who had once proclaimed, "Segregation Now, Segregation Tomorrow, Segregation Forever" might be transformed.

And he saw that dream come true -- not completely, but in great measure. And there was probably no more poignant moment in the history of the Civil Rights movement than when on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the Selma to Montgomery march, George Wallace met with Vivian Malone-Jones. You may not recall the name Vivian Malone. She was one of the young persons whose path Wallace had tried to block at the entrance to the University of Alabama. And so thirty years later there was a meeting between Ms. Jones and the former governor. Dr. Joseph Lowry was there for he had been invited to come and see this meeting of reconciliation between the former Governor and Ms. Malone. And after Wallace had greeted and spoken with the woman he had tried to prevent from

¹ Amos 5:24

attending the University of Alabama, from his wheelchair, George Wallace reached out and he took Dr. Lowry's hand. And he smiled up at Lowry as if to say, "Old warrior, as it turns out I was wrong. You were right."

King is on the Christian calendar because he lived into and was faithful to his call as best he understood it, and as best as he could live into it, with little regard for worldly affirmation or even for his personal safety. He had invited an entire country to come and see a better vision of how to live together.

But, the point is this morning is each of us is called. Like the disciples, we are called to COME AND SEE. We are called to leave our old selves behind and to enter into new lives guided by our baptismal covenant to seek and to serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbor as ourself. And we are called to new lives of receptivity to the Holy Spirit. We are called to hear the voice of Jesus and to walk forward in faith, albeit however slowly, however fitfully, however haltingly -- but to walk toward the one whose word is true.

Well, at the beginning of this sermon I suggested that this Gospel ends much as it begins. And so it does. For much like Jesus asked of his first disciples, "What are you looking for?", the risen Jesus will ask of Mary Magdeline who stood weeping just outside of an empty tomb, "Woman, why are you weeping [and] whom do you seek?"

And Mary would run back to the disciples and tell them the good news, that Christ has risen, and in effect, suggest that they COME AND SEE for themselves. And they did.

The invitation to COME AND SEE leads us inextricably to the cross, and to an empty tomb, and into a relationship with Jesus Christ. A relationship embodied in our Christian walk which is a call to live into our baptismal vows. It is a journey of faith. And the answer to the question, "What are you looking for," lies somehow within that journey.

There is a prayer in the *Lutheran Book of Worship* that describes that journey very well. It prays: Lord God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith, continues that prayer, to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.