

15 January 2023: The 2nd Sunday after Epiphany; John 1:29-41

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John: the four Gospel writers, according to Church Tradition. We must remember they were not newspaper reporters or historians as we understand such professions. The Evangelists are interested in something beyond “the facts;” their purpose is stated near the end of John’s Gospel: *...Jesus did many other signs...which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his Name* (20:30-31; cf. 21:24-25). Each Evangelist has a message about Jesus. We read the Gospels not as an information-gathering exercise. Our desire is to receive the Truth of Jesus and be faithful.

Remember this when pondering difficult passages as we have today. John the Baptist for the second time proclaims Jesus *Lamb of God*. Two of his disciples begin following Jesus, who obviously notices and asks them a question. Here’s where the strangeness begins. Jesus asks: *What are you looking for?*” His first words in John’s Gospel. Would it not have been more logical to ask, “Why are you following me?” Jesus asks a different question because the Gospel will reveal a different Truth. Following is passive: we get behind a leader, and tag along. There is little responsibility and lots of security in following. Followers always have the option to complain, second-guess or stop following when the going gets tough. Jesus asks what they are looking for. Looking for, seeking, is active. There is risk involved; attentiveness is necessary; discernment is crucial; and single-mindedness is indispensable. Seeking is adventure; a life in pursuit of something beyond the horizon, for what is outside previous experience; something not built on the predictable.

The answer the disciples give is even stranger. Jesus asks what they are looking for. They say: *Where are you staying?* They ask for his address! This is not just the disciples’ being thick-headed. As with Jesus’ question, there is something deeper. Throughout the Gospel John the Evangelist is preoccupied with the origin of Jesus: the curious and the hostile ask, “where do you come from?”, or say “we don’t know where you are from”, or “we reject you because you come from crummy Galilee”. John is clear: Jesus may have lived in Galilee, but his true origin is in God.

In answer to their question Jesus invites them, *“Come and see”*. In John’s Gospel, discipleship means literally to want Jesus to live with you, and you wanting to live with Jesus. In John 14:23, Jesus says, *“Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.”* From Chapter 15: *“Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing”* (v 5). And from John’s 1st Letter: *“God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God.”* (v15).

Jesus’ invitation ‘come and see’ reveals discipleship is a first-hand, intimate relationship. This relationship cannot be known second-hand: you must experience it to know it. This is the ancient understanding of the word “mystery”: something only known by entering the reality of the thing itself. Jesus is the Mystery of God’s loving-kind mercy. We cannot, as it were, stand on the outside and judge whether this is so. To know we answer the invitation and live into the relationship itself. The more casual we are toward the relationship, the more superficial it will be. The more intent and persevering we are, the more intimate we will be with Jesus.

Come and see is the foundation for evangelism. Our mission is not manipulating, intimidating, or guilt-tripping people into the God’s Kingdom. We invite—come and see. The obvious, unspoken part of the invitation is *“Come and see with me.”* If you have not invited someone to Church lately, do so. Be gentle, appropriately persistent, and never give up.

We *come and see* with Jesus and with one another. *Come and see* means making room in one’s life so others may know the love of Christ. We open our hearts and lives for Jesus and for other seekers. My life becomes our life; my need becomes our needs, my joy becomes our joy; my struggles, wishes, ways become friendship in service of others’ struggles, hopes and aspirations. Our love broadens from self to family, parish, city, country; we long to be of maximum service to those in need or necessity, for the love of Christ.

Come and see is both an invitation and a promise. Jesus invites us to keep on seeking God, because there is so much God yearns to give and will give us.

Blessing and honor, thanksgiving, and praise, more than we can offer, more than we can conceive, be yours, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, by all angels, all mortals, all creatures, for ever and ever. Amen.