

Let's Go See

from the pulpit of
Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church
Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania
by
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Psalm 40:1-5

¹I waited patiently for the LORD; he inclined to me and heard my cry.
²He drew me up from the desolate pit, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure. ³He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God. Many will see and fear, and put their trust in the LORD. ⁴Happy are those who make the LORD their trust, who do not turn to the proud, to those who go astray after false gods. ⁵You have multiplied, O LORD my God, your wondrous deeds and your thoughts toward us; none can compare with you. Were I to proclaim and tell of them, they would be more than can be counted.

John 1:29-42

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

³⁷The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. ³⁸When 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?” ³⁹He 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. ⁴⁰One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. ⁴¹He first found his brother Simon and said to him, “We have found the Messiah” (which is translated Anointed). ⁴²He 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).

There are a lot of titles heaped upon Jesus in this first chapter of John's gospel. John calls him the Word, and the Light which shines in the darkness. Then, as the story of Jesus' ministry unfolds, John the Baptist names him "Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world." Andrew calls him "Rabbi," which means "Teacher," and he introduces his brother Simon Peter to Jesus proclaiming him the "Messiah," God's Anointed.

It's a grand introduction of who Jesus is: Word, Light, Lamb of God, Teacher, Messiah – and yet Jesus himself does not stand still long enough for anyone to comprehend these lofty titles. Jesus moves through the pages of scripture as someone who has work to do, as if to say who he is cannot be separated from where he is going and what he does. We can bestow all the titles in the world upon him, but if we really want to know Jesus, we have to follow him; we have to join with others who gather behind him and say, "Let's go see" and go where he goes. John the Baptist started it when he told his own disciples who had been following him around the desert, "Look – here's the One I have been telling you about all along... Come and see."

When John's disciples start asking Jesus where he is going in our scripture reading this morning, that's what Jesus says, "Come and see." In the next few verses that's what Phillip will say to Nathaniel, and the number of Jesus' followers begins to grow.

From the other gospel writers – Matthew, Mark and Luke, we have imagined the disciples' response to Jesus' call as such a huge, life changing moment – a drop-your-nets, quit-your-job, leave-your-family and let's go... kind of event. But John may give us a more accessible way to think about discipleship – as more of a slow turning, a change in direction, a forward movement to see what is to come. We figure out who Jesus is, one-step at a time, as we begin to walk in his path, and learn from those around us – who are also following him.

The action in the text teases us to be curious about who Jesus really is, and then to look for signs that just might point to him. If you want to learn about what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, the Bible gives us plenty of titles, but we're better off going along with him and together we will see. We go where God is at work in the world: healing, teaching, freeing the oppressed, making peace, lifting up the lowly, welcoming all kinds of people – and there we will find Jesus.

Most Christians I know do not have some lightning bolt conversion and then become believers. Rather, we respond to Jesus' invitation, and in the process of discipleship we come to faith. As Dag Hammarskjold, the late United Nations Secretary and a man of deep faith, wrote in his memoirs: "I don't know who – or what – put the question, I don't know when it was put. I don't even remember answering. But at some moment I did answer Yes to Someone – or Something – and from that hour I was certain that existence is meaningful and that, therefore, my life, in self-surrender, had a goal." ¹

Central to our lives of faith is the idea that God has called us to a life of meaning and purpose, and in our following Jesus we are moving toward God's good and redemption vision for the world.

On this weekend in which the country pauses to remember Martin Luther King, Jr., I am struck with how his life as a disciple resonates with this call story from John's gospel. Like John the Baptist, Martin Luther King's greatness was not due to the crowds who gathered around him, but in the fact that he pointed beyond himself saying, "Let's go see what God is up to." He did not build some edifice; he led a movement.

Harvard University Chaplain, Peter Gomes, wrote: "We are led to remember Martin Luther King, Jr., ... because he was in our time a part of that great company of witnesses... whom God raised up to raise us up

¹ Hammarskjold quote from John Wilkinson, "Follow Me, Come and See," 3rd Pres. Rochester, 1/15/06.

from our bondage to the things that are, to the liberty of the things that can and ought to be. If we look for human perfection in him we will not find it, for he was a man and shared in the sins and weaknesses of our human flesh. If we look for him to be the burden-bearer of our times, our race, or our nation, we will find that he is unable to bear that burden – for he was in the struggle fully as much as we... but if we look to see in him what God is trying to do and to say... if in fact we look where he was looking, we may begin to see just what it was that sustained him, that is freely available to sustain us as well, pilgrims and saints, people always in process, always moving.”²

That is who we are as disciples of Jesus Christ, people in process... always moving... people intent on saying, “Let’s go see,” and then following the signs that point to him, and thus to find the fullness of our own lives in Jesus himself.

Early in my ministry I had an experience of how Martin Luther King, Jr. pointed toward Jesus. I was a young Associate Pastor at Central Presbyterian Church in downtown Atlanta, when I got a call inviting me to participate in the worship service at Ebenezer Baptist Church on one of the first MLK national holidays. It was huge honor to be in that sanctuary where young Martin grew up – it was filled with dignitaries from Washington, all the King family, the giants of the Civil Rights Movement from all over the country – had I not been invited to have a small part, I never would have gotten in the door.

This was in the late 80’s and I knew better than anyone that I was not there because of who I was, but because of the diversity I represented among that gathering – mainline, Protestant, white, clergy-woman, and I served a church not unlike this one – in that it was well known in the community for its social justice and advocacy work. When the phone call came from Christine King Ferris’ office, Martin’s sister’s

² Peter Gomes, *Sermons*, p. 48.

assistant, what I was asked to do was to read Martin Luther King's favorite passage of scripture.

They would call me back to give me the exact text, but I had a day or two to wonder what it was. You can imagine what immediately went through my head when I was told that – you'll be reading Martin's favorite passage of scripture. Maybe Exodus 7 – when the Lord God of the Hebrews said to Moses, "You go tell Pharaoh to let my people go." Or maybe that resounding prophetic word of Amos – "Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream."

Surely, King's favorite passage of scripture was one we can still hear resonating in his own voice from the Civil Rights Movement. But what I was asked to read that day in Ebenezer Baptist Church was neither from Exodus, nor one of the great prophets, but rather, "If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging symbol. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith so as to remove mountains, but have not love – I am nothing... Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude... love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things... love never ends." First Corinthians 13 was Dr. King's favorite scripture. You see, King was always pointing, pointing beyond himself, pointing beyond his own prophetic witness, beyond the Movement itself, saying "Let's go see."

Friends at Bryn Mawr, in this year that stretches out before us -- let's go see where Jesus himself is leading us – to meet signs of hatred with love, to work for the equality for of all people; to strive for harmony among the races; to live our faith by being brave in action – to follow Jesus who steps out in front of us, saying: "Together, come and see."

Amen.