

ISAIAH 49:1-7

PSALM 40:1-11

I CORINTHIANS 1:1-9

JOHN 1:29-42

Second Sunday after the Epiphany; Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

January 15, 2023; Year A

(The preached portion of the sermon is in bold.)

Come and See!

Come and see! Come and see what? Come and see how? Come and see who? Come and see, when? No, come and see where? Jesus had just been baptized the day before, immersed by his loudmouth, obnoxious, cousin John the Baptist, the Messiah in waiting totally wet behind the ears, still very green, yes, a literal and metaphorical description of the young rabbi's present rookie status, the state of his current condition, having recently ended his lifelong career as a good- for- humanity-seemingly-time-wasted-years as an apprentice carpenter! These formative years were now quickly fading into the rearview mirror of his life. What lied ahead was nowhere visible on his limited but expansively, evolving and unfolding radar! And now on this second day following Jesus' acquiescence into the baptismal waters of the Jordan River, we find John T. Baptist standing idly with two of his disciples, no doubt continuing to discuss the previous days heavily meaningful activities, the Gospel writer John looking back with the early Church and describing, no proclaiming, Jesus to be the very "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" Unfortunately, this was a first century reference that became a most troublingly disconcerting view, the flawed belief that God had sent Jesus as the only son directly to earth only to die, for that sole purpose because God needed to be appeased and avenged. This theological mutation the kind of retribution that only a child sacrifice could accomplish, sufficing as what came to be known as the propitiation for our sin. Different problem for a different day! Once again, as John and his disciples turned to see the great sight of the man from Nazareth, the Baptizer boldly declared once again for all within earshot and to no one in particular and to everyone who

could hear, reiterating his profound belief, that here indeed stands among you the Lamb of God, one of many titles the Johannine writer claims for Jesus, reflecting the theology of John's local community! We get the Gospel writer's point! But while we might have thought Jesus was answering a most profound question proposed to the fledgling rabbi, we quickly discover that these two disciples were simply asking Jesus a pedestrian logistical question! They were in no way asking about any one of his many purported miraculous actions, feats that seemed to transcend the laws of science, nothing about a teaching perceived as difficult but yet, easy to understand, like the old Love Boat, exciting and new! "Come aboard," he's "expecting you!" No, these about to be called apostles' question was much more practical, much more of a pragmatic inquiry. Where was Jesus staying? His answer, "come and see!" And no doubt they did, filled with as much excitement and anticipation, as much wonder and bewilderment as they could bear, learning quickly that they were on his radar, about to become disciples, part of the original twelve!

Now if going to take a tour of wherever it was that Jesus was staying was all we had to talk about in a sermon, not much of a sermon would it be? There would not be much of anything to see here! But being the preacher that I am, always looking for the ever-elusive homiletical angle, a theme or a topic lurking, even hiding, in our Sunday lections, a word or phrase on which to wax eloquent in the pulpit, this seemingly benign phrase is absolutely loaded, a cup overflowing with potential metaphorical meaning, a veritable cornucopia of allegory and symbolism. If we give ourselves permission and allow an eisegetical or devotional hook, this short innocuous phrase gives any pulpiter a wide birth, a broad scope, from which to proclaim what is always hoped to be a new, challenging, and informative word. For we will learn throughout this calendric and liturgical year, as we mark the many milestones in Jesus' life during this Church Year, that there is much to see, much to experience, much to learn in these high and holy celebrations and these somber observances. Every year we travel with Jesus, we learn from him though the four Gospels interspersed in the liturgical cycles of Year A, Year B, and Year C. Every go round we make new discoveries, are exposed to new avenues, entering newly opened doors and windows, that even if slightly cracked, allow for a rush of knowledge that draws us ever closer to understanding better the man of Nazareth. All combined these

entryways persuasively call us to not just “come and see,” but to come and follow as disciples, yes, not to just watch and learn, to observe something as if in a laboratory, but to do something, to make use of our human and divine discoveries. Oh, what an adventure! In as many ways as is humanly possible, as wide-eyed as we are, our goal is to be as captivated, as mesmerized, as were the original twelve and the many unnamed who would follow in Jesus’ footsteps and would eventually form the early Church, breaking away from traditional Judaism as a sectarian offshoot, a permanent schism that was the final straw, the ultimate unfortunate solution.

From this day forward, Sunday after Sunday, we will experience the highs and the lows, the sudden swings, the adrenalin rushes, the raw emotions, that come with every Gospel story, with every biblical narrative describing in exquisite detail every encounter that takes place between Jesus and friends and foes alike. Think of the cast of characters, main and supporting! Think of all the episodic adventures that transport us through the Gospel narratives. We have already once again experienced Jesus’ birth as magnificently described by the creative writers Luke and Matthew who have, yes, creatively and imaginatively, woven together in their unique infancy narratives the most elaborate, if seemingly farfetched, plot lines. We have joined with the wise Magi as they traveled far and wide, stars in their eyes, as these star gazing astrologers sought and found the young boy, a lad who in the estimation of millions would become the most widely debated and discussed figure in the history of the world, bar none! Now, we fix our eyes onto a young adult of the age of thirty, life holding so much promise, so much possibility and potential. Having been a sheltered carpenter, doing his daddy’s bidding, he is now setting out on his own, ready to do his Abba’s, his heavenly Father’s bidding! Yes, he is all grown up with many places to go! It is both interesting and ironic, knowing full well how the story goes, how it begins and how it ends, and every detail to which we are privy in in between, and yet, far better than any fictional novel or movie, we are captivated in ways as if it were the first time when we read once again these old, old, stories. To use the late progressive Christian scripture scholar Marcus Borg, we read, or should, or must, read these highly embellished, yes, no doubt, greatly exaggerated, biographies as if for the first time. These stories never lose their edge, never lose their appeal, never lose their captivating presence. Our hunch, and it is our only

and our best hunch, our belief, is that the content that separates these words from all other writ, holy and otherwise, is that this literary verbiage is somehow weighted, we call it inspired, by the eternal presence of the Holy. This does not mean exclusively so, but to this we pay the most intense, rapt, attention! Come and see!

We will read of conversions and conversations, confrontations and conflicts, of miraculous misconceptions once erroneously interpreted in their mythological, pre-scientific, day and now frozen in time for all time, timebound as is all language. We will read of lessons taught and well learned, of sermons preached so eloquently in their simplicity but poignancy. We will read of high drama, experiencing every emotion, that even if historically not factual in many ways, reveals at its essence a kernel of literal transactions that point to an amazingly larger-than-life figure who lived life to his fullest and was, ironically, the most alive at his very death. In his dying the slow and painful death of crucifixion, the most brutal, gruesome execution imaginable, an egregious wrong that was as horrific as it was unjust, anxiety and fear, insecurity and paranoia getting the best, or the worst, of Roman occupiers, no Jewish fingerprints found on any of the hammer and nails, in Jesus' death we were shown not only how to live, but what it means to live, yes, what it means to be fully alive. As the early Church looked back on Jesus' untimely death, we read of the ways, good and bad, positively and negatively, that these early "followers of the way" who would come to be called Christian at a summit of apostolic leaders meeting at Antioch, forthrightly interpreted the atrocity of Jesus' killing to meet their immediate ecclesiological requirements, their theological needs. In their memories, in their experience, they came to an awareness, a belief, a consciousness, somewhere deep in their souls, resonating in their being, that Jesus was not dead, that indeed he was risen, resurrection becoming a profoundly symbolic image, an outlandish vernacular that was a metaphor befitting all life forms, especially and particularly, specifically, regarding the human creature, relating fully to the human circumstance and situation. Come and see! Resurrection became real in both a literal and a metaphorical, metaphysical, way, an acknowledgment that indeed something supernatural, of greatest awe and wonder, mysterious and mystical, that something transcendent had magically, miraculously, and mysteriously, happened in the world and to each one of them. Come and see!

Beyond description, they gave it description, they crafted words to describe their resurrective experience, peculiar language, giving resurrection motifs their best linguistic thought, words transcending the routine, the ordinary, of their wildest imagination. Come and see! They dared put into writing feelings and emotions that were beyond human comprehension. Even as they struggled to articulate, to express, these multifaceted and amazing realities in their midst, so we too grapple with our profoundest doubt and faith. “I believe, help by unbelief!” It is the best we can do, the most we can achieve or accomplish, the most available, the ultimate we can get on this side of eternity. Come and see!

It is for these reasons and oh so many more that the apostle Paul could say to the Corinthian church and then to everyone of us that through Jesus, the humble man of Nazareth, that we have been made rich through his life. We now gladly tell the story, his story, communicating the perfect love of God as exhibited through the lovingly good grace offered to every person Jesus encountered, all those with whom he engaged any level of interaction. Paul reminds us of the knowledge brought to us by this real human being who taught us how to learn from him, from one another, and from God, loving each as we go, learning equally how to live and love in the world. Paul declares that there is no spiritual gift missing from us whatsoever as disciples who have chosen to follow Jesus in every way he bids us come and go. We are made blameless, forgiven, graced with all grace, grace upon grace, our faithfulness not only enhanced, nurtured, but emboldened and empowered because Jesus has called us to be partners, yes, equals, with him. What a daring, audacious, pronouncement and promise. Jesus calls us to be co-laborers in his ministry and mission, in teaching and preaching, proclaiming that indeed there is gospel abounding, good news, on all fronts. It is there for all of us to seize as our own. Come and see! The Psalmist today reinforces our hope in God, reminding us that, no matter, despite, our troubles, all that seeks to bring us down in the mouth, that we have been lifted to new heights, a song put in our hearts in praise of God because we have learned to trust in the Holy One even amidst the vortex of all that searches and destroys our spirits. The Psalm writer reminds us of all the wonderful things that God has done for us, too numerous to count, that good news not only exists amid the darkness but will ultimately triumph at the brightest glorious light. And this season is all about life! God’s loyal love is ours to receive, and it is Christ Jesus who has embodied the very essence of this gracious

goodness revealing perpetually to us what living these promises looks like in every way imaginable. Come and see!

Once upon a time, two disciples of John who would become disciples of Jesus, the Baptizer joyfully and willingly letting them go, this duo would ask a very simple question as to the whereabouts of Jesus' current home, his "crib" as they say in some circles today. His response, "Come and see!" Little did they realize, how little did they know, that in these three short, one syllable, words, would become the greatest three year adventure in the history of humankind. For not only would they discover on that day where he lived, which was probably some seriously temporary shelter, maybe still at home with mom and dad—who knows—but they would discover so much more, the very keys to the realm of God. They would learn the secret to a most fulfilling life, indeed, discovering exactly what it means to be fully human, to become all they could be. And through their impending adventures with Jesus, we too would learn the essence of life's meaning and what it means to be people of eternity, committed to bringing peace on earth and every social justice initiative into a hurting world. As we explore the life of Jesus as he travels from Nazareth in Galilee, Jerusalem, and all points surrounding and in between, once again as we embark on a new Church Year together, with Matthew taking the lead as our primary literary tour guide this time around, with a sprinkling of John's Gospel always thrown into the mix for good measure, I invite you once again to join me on a journey, the journey with Jesus! Come and see! Come and see! Come and see!

In the name of the One who creates, redeems, and sustains and bids us come and see because, indeed, there is much to see here! Amen and amen.