

**4<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Epiphany**  
**John 1:35-51**

**January 29, 2012**  
**“Come and See”**

**the Rev. Michelle Slater**

*The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, ‘Look, here is the Lamb of God!’ The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. When 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?’ He 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. One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. He first found his brother Simon and said to him, ‘We have found the Messiah’ (which is translated Anointed). He 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).*

*The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, ‘Follow me.’ Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, ‘We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth.’ Nathanael said to him, ‘Can anything good come out of Nazareth?’ Philip said to him, ‘Come and see.’ When Jesus saw Nathanael coming towards him, he said of him, ‘Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!’ Nathanael asked him, ‘Where did you come to know me?’ Jesus answered, ‘I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.’ Nathanael replied, ‘Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!’ Jesus answered, ‘Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these.’ And he said to him, ‘Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.’*

It’s the beginning of the month in a few days, which means a bunch of people will be dropping by the church this week. There are a number of people who come by here regularly looking for help, who have found themselves on hard times and need some food to get by, some bus tickets to get around, some cash to buy a prescription that they can’t afford.

Like a lot of ministers, I’m not usually just content to hand things out. I want to know more. I want to develop a relationship of some kind, as minimal as it can be. I want to know more about how they ended up in the situation they’re in, and if there are any resources we or another agency can provide to get them on their feet again.

Because every one of them who walks in here looking for help, also comes carrying their story, the story of their life. Some of them hold their life out at arm's length, as if they don't want to get too close to it; they don't want to talk about it, because of the shame. Some of them bring their life like they are cradling a tiny bird with a broken wing; it is so fragile and vulnerable even a strong breeze might blow them over. Some are dragging their life around behind them like baggage, as if they were so much baggage.

Lots of their stories break my heart. Stories of escaping from death squads in Guatemala and El Salvador. Stories of childhood abandonment and abuse. Stories of alcoholism and drug addiction that spans generations. Stories of mistrust and an inability to love, to be vulnerable enough to possibly get hurt again. Stories of lifelong mental illness and slipping through the cracks of a social safety net that is full of holes. A lot of the lives people carry in here with them, especially this first week of the month, break my heart.

But they're not the only ones who carry their life in here with them, these people who I call "poor" or "homeless" or "struggling". We all do. We all come into this church this morning with our life in our hands.

The writer of the gospel of John begins his story about Jesus with the story of Andrew and another disciple who started to follow Jesus. They didn't sign up for a program, or a book study, or a course; they just started following him. Hanging around, you might say: not too far off, but not too close either. And Jesus turned around and saw them and asked, "What are you looking for?" And they answered, "Where are you staying?" And he said, "Come and see."

According to John's gospel, this is how you start a relationship with Jesus. It's not about how much you know about him, or about Scripture, or about religion. It's not about what you think you believe in your head. It's not about being good enough or worthy enough to be in his company. It's about just starting to follow: putting one foot in front of the other, in the knowledge that something in your life needs to change and this might be a person who can help that happen. It's about carrying your life into the presence of someone who can transform it.

"What are you looking for?" Jesus asks them, as they begin to follow him. It's a good question. What brings you out of bed, into the cold, along rainy streets, to church this morning? Why are you bringing your life here? What are you looking for? If Jesus were to ask you that question, if you sat with it in the silence, what would you hear rising from inside of you? (ring bell)

*I am looking for forgiveness, for the pain I have caused.*

*I am looking for healing from the effects of the tragedy I have suffered.*

*I am looking for hope to overcome the depression that weighs on me so heavily.*

*I am looking for a miracle to break the chains of my addiction.*

*I'm looking for a reason to go on for one more day.*

*I am looking for a way to forgive myself.*

*I am looking for something bigger than myself, something that can inspire me and sustain me and hold me up for the rest of the week, or even just the rest of the day.*

Maybe one of these is the reason you are here.

Yet when we return to the story, we find that Jesus' new followers can't seem to answer the question. They don't ask that their sins be forgiven or their loved ones healed of what ails them. They ask instead: "Where are you staying?" It sounds like an avoidance technique, doesn't it? Answering a question with another question, and a question that doesn't seem to follow at that. Jesus asks them what they are looking for, and rather than answer, they ask him whose house he's staying at.

But maybe they're not avoiding his question. Maybe, they simply want to know where he is staying because they want to go there too. They want, literally, to stay with him, to be where is, to follow him. And his answer to them is not an answer at all, but an invitation: "Come and see." Come and see. Not, sit down and listen and take notes, or think, or plan, or try. Just come. Come, in person, with your whole being, and see. Come and see, and carry your life, into the presence of the one who truly sees you.

For that is what happens, in the rest of the story. Jesus sees Nathanael, another potential follower, and knows him, right away. Nathanael is suspicious and asks, "Where do you know me from?" And Jesus answers: "I saw you under the fig tree." In the Hebrew Bible, the fig tree is often a metaphor for one's home. So Jesus is saying, "I saw you at your home." I *SAW* you, Jesus says. Not the kind of seeing as taking in information with your eyes. But the kind of seeing that is the deep understanding, deep knowledge, deep insight. "I see," we say, when we profoundly and deeply know or understand something or someone.

In other words, Jesus says, I saw you in your life, doing what you do, seeing what you see, loving who and what you love, worrying about your troubles, wrestling with your struggles, hurting over what has hurt you, hoping your deepest hopes.

Because the one who invites us to "come and see" the life he has waiting for us, also comes to see us, as well. Comes right in, when we invite him. "Come and see," we say to Jesus, wondering what he will think, what he will say, when we bring him into the very truth of our lives. I wonder, if you invited Jesus to "come and see", if you took him to your home, to your life, what would you show him? (ring bell)

Well, what would you show him? What you are proud of? Your accomplishments... your strengths... your family. What about what you are ashamed of? Would you show him that? The things that you wish you hadn't done... the mistakes you've made... the messes you've created... the regrets you carry around.

And what about your deepest wounds? Would you invite him to see those? The places that still hurt, long after you'd think they would stop...the comments that got under your skin and you can't shake off...the broken relationships and shattered dreams and ongoing grief.

Whatever it is, all that it is, that we would show him, it is not the end of the encounter but the beginning. Because Jesus then invites us to "come and see" the life he has in store for us. And he calls us to this life, invites us into this life, not in spite of who we aren't, but because of who we really are. No matter what our stories are; no matter what the life is that we carried into church this day.

Because the God who calls us is the also the God who knows us better than we know ourselves; who has searched us and knows us and loves us, through and through. This God has a life for us that embraces and transforms the life we carry in our trembling hands. A life that is beyond our preoccupations with being good enough. A life that is bigger than our obligations and duties. A life that is deeper than what gives us security. A life that is more whole and holy than anything we can devise for ourselves. A life that is worth living, even in the midst of all the things life can throw at us.

"What are you looking for?" Come and see. Amen.