

Come and See!  
John 1.29, 35-42a  
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Come and See --- what an invitation. Come, see, and contemplate where Jesus might be among us today. Come, see, and witness how Christ is visible in our world today. Come, see and experience the inbreaking of God's presence. Come, see and realize for yourself how God is working miracles in the lives of people associated with the ministry of Sunshine Cathedral in Fort Lauderdale and Jamaica ... Come and see the abundant life, promised of old. Come and see --- that is a powerful invitation.

In our reading for today from the Gospel according to St. John the Evangelist, John the Baptizer - whom, we remember, is the son of Mary's cousin, Elizabeth - has been out in the wilderness, preaching and begging people to turn away from their former way of thinking and living and prepare the way for the One, the one who would offer hope to the people suffering from oppression and bondage under the current political system.

Reading the whole story of our text today, we notice that John the Baptizer sees Jesus coming, and recognizes him not as a near relative, but as the Lamb of God. Now this John has known that Jesus was special since before he was born, because we are told that when Mary found out she was pregnant, she went to visit Elizabeth, who had, herself, become pregnant with John in a miraculous way. When the infant "leapt in her womb" as Mary approached, Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and cried out, "Blessed are you among women...why has this happened to me, why am I so favored, that the mother of the Messiah should come to me?"

Now, that's Luke's version of the story. John the Evangelist does not seem to mention anything about John the Baptizer being a close relative to Jesus. In fact, John the Evangelist does not mention any of the details surrounding the birth of Jesus that we have learned from Matthew and Luke. There are no angelic announcements to Mary or Joseph, no shepherds, no Magi, no slaughter of the innocent children by King Herod while Jesus is in hiding. Like Mark, who also does not seem to care about Jesus' early life or whether he and John the Baptizer were related, John begins with the baptism of Jesus. He starts by proclaiming that the Word - which in some way is both God and eternally in the presence of God - has become flesh and stayed for a little while among us, and by showing that this Word is the one that we have come to know as Jesus of Nazareth.

However, according to John the Evangelist, John the Baptizer didn't even recognize that Jesus was the one he was looking for - or maybe didn't even know his name - until he baptized him with water and saw the Holy Spirit descend upon him like a dove.

So what are we to make of these discrepancies? Should we read these stories as absolute truth, handed down by God, harmonizing away any differences? Or should we accept the verdict of cynics, who say that since the Gospel stories do not agree with one another, and they are filled with impossible things anyway, all that we know of Jesus is untrue? Or

should we pay attention to the teaching of historians, who say that each of the Gospels was written with the concerns of a specific community in mind, and that different communities preserved different stories about Jesus according to their own memory.

Many of us have learned to trust that God speaks to us precisely through the incomplete, the mysterious, and sometimes even through reflecting upon the incompatible stories of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. The messiness of the gospel stories, as we have received them, is itself a message about the gift of our own, imperfect lives that can transform us and, through us, begin to heal our broken world. As Jesus said to Andrew and another disciple of John, who asked where he was staying, the simple reply was "Come and see" so how might this invitation speak to us today?

I believe that it speaks to us through the 1<sup>st</sup> Point of Progressive Christianity which was our first reading today. It said that by calling ourselves progressive, we mean that we are Christians who have found an approach to God through the life and teachings of Jesus.

Historically, we read that in Genesis, God is said to have rested after every act of creation, and God called it good; we read later that Jacob has a vision of a heavenly staircase, representing a token of God's love and care for him. The dreamer, Joseph sees his family in a dream as sheaves of wheat, or sun, moon, and stars, foretelling his future position of importance in Egypt. The judges are said to have lived in a time without kings, when everyone did what was right in his or her own sight.

In the Gospels, Jesus gives sight to those who cannot see, and - as we have heard in our reading this morning - we are invited to come and see the wonders because in our approach to Jesus we have find healing, we have found comfort, we have found grace, we have found understanding, we have opportunities to grow in our faith, we find liberation, and most importantly, we have found hope.

I believe that God does not invite us where God cannot take us. On our journeys as progressive Christians we are invited to come and see for ourselves, and that is a personal invitation to find that approach that works best for each of us to develop and/or rekindle our relationship with God as we understand God.

Being progressive Christians does not mean we live in a perfect world, of course. I am reminded of this on this Martin Luther King Jr weekend, I was recently moved by reading some words of Dr. King's in a sermon many years ago, he said: "There is so much frustration in the world," he wrote, "because we have relied on gods rather than God. We have genuflected before the god of science only to find that it has given us the atomic bomb, producing fears and anxieties that science can never mitigate. We have worshiped the god of pleasure only to discover that thrills play out and sensations are short-lived. We have bowed before the god of money only to learn that there are such things as love and friendship that money cannot buy...money is a rather uncertain deity. These transitory gods are not able to save or bring happiness to the human heart. Only God is able. It is faith in God that we must rediscover."

And I believe that we are able to rediscover this faith because God does not invite us, where God cannot take us on this journey to find an approach to God through the life and teachings of Jesus. And that is the truth as I understand it. Amen.

Closing thought: I close with these words of Desmond Tutu: "At home in South Africa I have sometimes said in big meetings where you have black and white together: 'Raise your hands!' Then I've said, 'Move your hands,' and I've said, 'Look at your hands – different colors representing different people. You are the rainbow people of God.' And you remember the rainbow in the Bible is the sign of peace. The rainbow is the sign of prosperity. We want peace, prosperity, and justice and we can have it when all the people of God, the rainbow people of God, work together."