

Come and See

John 1:29-42

Crossroads Christian Church

1 Corinthians 1:1-9

Epiphany 2 January 19,2014

The season of Epiphany is a time when we look at some of the clues that God drops about who Jesus is, and what God intends to do through Jesus. This year, in the lectionary, we look at some of those clues or revelations through the Gospels of Matthew and John, and, at least most Sundays, Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. They each invite us, to use Jesus' invitation from today's Gospel text, to "Come and See" who Jesus is. So come with me and we'll see what happens.

Last Sunday we talked about baptism. When I help somebody prepare for baptism, I sometimes ask the question, "Who is Jesus Christ to You?" One time someone asked that question back to me in a group, and I said something like this: "Jesus Christ to me is the human face of God, the sure sign that God loves us so much that God became one of us, facing all the temptations, the pain, and the joy of human life. Jesus called people to follow God's way, he set people free, he taught, he healed, he shared God's love with others, and he challenged the status quo enough that his enemies put him to death. But God raised him from the dead, and because of that we have hope that when we die, we return to God. And I believe that Christ's Spirit is with us now, here, in worship, and all the time." It's not a complete statement, and I'm sure that I left important things out. Most likely, if I made the same kind of statement at other points in my life, and to other audiences, some different things would be there.

Who is Jesus Christ to you? It's a question we all are called to answer, whether in discussion with other people, or just in our minds. We all have a sense of who Jesus Christ is. Maybe we have favorite images from childhood that help us picture Jesus. For me it was the large framed picture in my grandmother's bedroom, of Jesus as the good shepherd, carrying a lamb, while the mother sheep walked alongside, looking up at him in trust. I have a friend who had a picture of the laughing Jesus, for it helped her see the joy, the love, and the humor that our Savior expressed. Some people see Jesus as the baby lying in a manger; others perceive Jesus as strict and judgmental; others as loving and forgiving; others as the one bleeding on the cross, dying for our sins. Who is Jesus to you?

Today's Gospel lesson shows us how some people expressed who Jesus was for them. First came John the Baptizer. John baptized people as an act of repentance, an act of beginning over again. It was an act of cleansing, an act of purification. And all the time he kept saying that one was coming who would be God's Messiah—and that he, John, wasn't worthy to shine his shoes. Yet John did baptize Jesus, and God's voice was heard—"This is my son, the beloved, with whom I am well pleased." So that's who Jesus was to God—God's beloved son.

Now we pick up the story of what happened the next day from the Gospel of John. John the Baptist calls out: "Behold, the lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world." What did John mean when he called Jesus the Lamb of God? He didn't mean that Jesus was cute, cuddly and wooly. Jewish worship at that time was built upon the concept of sacrifice, of offering up something of value to God as an attempt to stay in God's favor, or to ask God's forgiveness, or to honor God. The lamb was the animal of choice for these sacrifices. So people could do the math. Lamb=sacrifice=forgiveness. But there's something more here. John, the son of a priest, probably knew that terrifying story from Genesis when Abraham was called to sacrifice his son, Isaac, after so many years of being childless. On the way to the mountain of sacrifice, Isaac asked, "Where is the lamb?" and Abraham said, "God will provide the lamb." Abraham was fudging, for he thought Isaac was to be the lamb. Instead, God did provide a real ram for the sacrifice after sparing Isaac's life. So instead of Jesus being the sacrificial lamb that people offered to God, Jesus was the lamb that God offered to people. See the difference? Ultimately, our sins could be forgiven only by God's action, not ours. And Jesus was the one who would bring about atonement. John the Baptist went on to witness that he had watched God's Spirit descend upon Jesus, and that this truly was the Messiah, the one that God was sending to baptize people with the Holy Spirit. Who is Jesus to John the Baptist? The sacrificial lamb of God, come to set the world free from the power of sin.

The next day, John the Baptist again pointed out Jesus as the Lamb of God. Now John had his own circle of disciples, a word that means followers, or students. John the Baptist did something unexpected. He said, "Don't follow me, follow him. He's the one that I've been telling you about." John passed the baton. So two of John's followers, disciples, actually began to follow Jesus down the road.

Then Jesus turns and asks them, “What are you looking for?” and they, being good Jews, answered a question with a question, and asked, “teacher, where are you staying?” And Jesus invited them, “Come and see.”

Have you ever had that crucial, awkward, exciting, frightening moment in your life when you have the opportunity to meet someone who’s really important to you, but whom you have never met? Maybe it’s the president, or a senator, or a recruiter for a college you want to attend, or even a cute girl or boy that you’ve had a crush on, but have never worked up the nerve to say hello? You debate in your mind a hundred times in a second, should I? Shouldn’t I? Should I? Shouldn’t I? Will the other person be friendly, or will they brush me off? That’s what it must have been like for Andrew and the other disciple. So Jesus made the first move, and invited them to tag along. In that wonderful first encounter, they got to know Jesus, the human face of God.

The next day, Andrew went to tell his brother Simon all about it. “We have found the Messiah!” Andrew told him. You need to come meet him! Simon went along with it, and tagged after his brother. And Jesus said, “You are Simon, son of John, but I’m going to call you my Rock.” So to the disciples, Jesus was the Messiah, the one sent from God to deliver the people. They had no idea how that would come about, but there was something about Jesus that inspired their trust and confidence. They would follow him anywhere—and they did.

The path they would follow led to the cross, and to the empty tomb, it led to the upper room at Pentecost, when the spirit of the risen Christ called the church to life, it led them to go into the whole known world of their day, saying, “We have found him. We have found the Messiah, and he is Jesus Christ.” The path led outward, until some of your own spiritual ancestors came here and established First Christian Church of East St. Louis, or Hillcrest Christian Church, with the assurance that they weren’t traveling alone, that Jesus Christ was with them.

So here we are today, and the question is still the same. Who is Jesus Christ to you? If you’re not sure that you know, he has an invitation for you. Come and see. Meet Christ in the words of scripture, meet Christ at Holy Communion, meet Christ in service to others, meet Christ in prayer, meet Christ in following the dream of peace and justice for all God’s children. Who is Jesus Christ for you? Come and see. Come and discover. Amen.

By Michael E. Dixon

.