

SERMON: Come and See!
TEXT: John 1:29-42

1-15-23

A few years ago I traveled to a small town in southwestern Pennsylvania to interview with a church there. It is a mountainous region of the country – not mountainous like Colorado, but mountainous like southeast Missouri. The weather in that part of the country is often overcast or foggy. But one thing that everyone enjoyed and took pride in about their town was a giant cross that stood atop one of the mountains and that could be seen for miles. So every person I met asked me, “Have you seen the cross?” Well, due to the overcast and foggy weather, I had not seen the cross. As we toured around the town, my hosts would point and say, “Well, you can’t see it right now, but the cross is right up there.”

I tried to act impressed, but after the first few times I didn’t know what to say anymore. “I’m sure it’s beautiful.” “So, that’s where it is.” “Aha.” ... Finally, on my third day there, the sun

was shining, and I **did** see the cross, and it **was** quite impressive. On my trip home, as I pondered everything I'd seen and heard, I realized that these people didn't have much else in their town to brag about. It was an old mining town that was not only dreary in terms of the weather, but was also economically depressed.

The point is, though, that sometimes you have to see it to believe it. You can tell someone about an experience you've had until you're blue in the face, but if they haven't experienced it themselves, it's going to be hard to understand. You know how you can tell someone a funny story – so funny that it had you in tears with laughter – and the person you tell barely gets a chuckle out of it? That's one of those situations where the only answer is, "I guess you had to be there."

Faith is like that. You may have heard that faith cannot be **taught** – it has to be **caught**. Even Jesus understood this.

Although he was a preacher and a teacher, and we have many of his words recorded in the gospels, there were also many times in his ministry where he was a man of few words.

Take, for instance, the lesson we heard from the gospel of John. John the Baptizer is out among his disciples when he sees Jesus coming toward them. He points to Jesus and proclaims, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" Then he describes his experience of baptizing Jesus and seeing the dove – the Holy Spirit – descend upon him as he emerges from the water. John says, "I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God."

Think for a moment about what a bold statement this was. I'm sure it was not every day that people described anyone as "the Son of God." But John was respected, at least by his disciples, and though others might have thought him crazy, his disciples would have paid close attention to such a remark.

The next day, John and his disciples see Jesus again, and John again points to Jesus, saying, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!" By this time the disciples are intrigued enough that they want to see for themselves. So they begin to follow Jesus. Jesus questions them, "What are you looking for?" They respond, "Rabbi, (Teacher), where are you staying?" And Jesus replies, "Come and see."

This is a curious interaction to me. "What are you looking for?" seems like an odd question for Jesus to ask. Yet commentaries agree that John's writing often conveys both literal and symbolic meaning. In other words, yes, Jesus was really looking for an answer when he asked these two men what they were looking for. But Jesus' question also applies to us, and all who would read John's gospel: "What are you looking for?" Jesus wants to know what is our purpose in following him, what are we hoping to find, what questions do we expect him to answer? These are central questions of our faith: "What are you

looking for” as you pray, as you study the Bible, as you teach your children, as you worship on Sunday morning, as you sing and as you work and as you serve God’s people? “What are you looking for?”

This question also, I think, wants us to examine how serious we are in our faith. Are we following just out of curiosity, because we have nothing better to do, or are we committed to the journey even when our questions are not immediately answered, even knowing that the journey will take a lifetime?

The disciples show that they are serious in their following when they answer his question with a question of their own: “Where are you staying?”

You can learn a lot about a person by seeing where they live and how they live. You can learn about their tastes, their likes

and dislikes, their hobbies, their habits, their family and friends, even their values. So, by asking the question, "Where are you staying?," the disciples are indicating that they want to learn more about Jesus. Not only that, but they want to know where they can find him if they get separated and they have to look for him again.

Have you ever borrowed five or ten dollars from a friend and told them, "You know where I live"? It's like saying, "You know you can trust me, you know I'm good for it, you know where you can find me if I forget to pay you back." Knowing where someone lives usually indicates that a relationship has been established.

You never have a blind date pick you up at your home – you meet them somewhere, because you don't know yet if you want that person to know where you live. The disciples ask Jesus, "where are you staying," as a way of saying that they want to establish a relationship with him.

When Jesus says, COME AND SEE, it is an invitation into a relationship with him. It is not something that can be adequately described with words. You have to see Jesus for yourself, you have to have your own experience with God, you have to *be there* and be actively involved in order to be a disciple.

COME AND SEE is one of my favorite phrases of the faith, because I think it so simply and clearly describes what we are about as a church, and what we are called to do as disciples. Many churches ask people to give their *testimonial* about their own experiences of God. And while this kind of faith sharing can be extremely powerful, there is nothing that can take the place of personal experience. So, in addition to telling our own stories of faith, we need to be inviting people to COME AND SEE. We need to offer them opportunities where they are likely to experience God for themselves.

One of the elders in a church I served years ago was a young woman who was passionate about her faith. She was a school teacher and served on the Christian Education committee. When she shared her ideas for teaching children the faith, she often talked of giving the children a "God moment." To her, it was not just about telling Bible Stories, it was about getting the children involved in the stories, so that it became "their" story, so that they could have a "God moment."

We all have a story to tell. We all have God moments in our lives. Sometimes our faith has become such a habit, that we don't remember or realize that we have a story to tell. Furthermore, it's not enough to just tell others. We have to show them, so they can have their own story. May we share our faith by pointing to Jesus where we see him in the world. COME AND SEE! To the glory of God!

AMEN.

