

“Come and See”
John 1:29-42
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When we have an Inquirer’s Class for people who are interested in becoming members of our church, I usually talk a little about the history of the church and there’s a story that I always like to tell during that part. It’s a story that Jim Bier, son of one of our founding members, John Bier, told me. Jim told me that some representatives from the presbytery were going around knocking on doors to see if anyone would be interested in starting a new Presbyterian church here in the neighborhood. John and Marjorie Bier lived back there on Duke Road, and when the people with the clipboards met John and told him what they were doing, Jim told me John took the clipboard and said, “I’ll take it from here.”

I love to tell that story, and I wanted to share it here this morning because it reminds us that there was a time when this church didn’t yet exist. Lakewood Presbyterian Church had a beginning, and today’s Scripture lesson reminds us of something similar about that little group that we follow through the Gospels - Jesus and his twelve disciples.

Last week we read about Jesus’s baptism which marked the beginning of his public ministry, but there were no disciples following Jesus at that point. Soon after his baptism, though, that little band of followers began to form, and in the verses we read today, John gives

an account about how it began to take shape. Let's listen to the Scripture, John 1:29-42.

The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! ³⁰This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.’ ³¹I myself did not know him, but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel.” ³²And John testified, “I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. ³³I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’³⁴ And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Chosen One.”

³⁵The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, ³⁶and as he watched Jesus walk by he exclaimed, “Look, here is the Lamb of God!” ³⁷The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. ³⁸When 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?” ³⁹He 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. ⁴⁰One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. ⁴¹He first found his brother Simon and said to him, “We have found the Messiah” (which is translated Anointed). ⁴²He 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).

There are three things happening in this passage that I want to point out today and a word to go with each of those things that can help us think about how God works in our lives, and through us, and in the lives of others. We can see something here about how a relationship with Christ begins and about how faith communities like ours, or the inner circle around Jesus form, and grow, and have an impact.

The first thing that we see happening in the passage is John carrying out his ministry, and the first word is testimony. John's Gospel is the only Gospel that doesn't show John baptizing Jesus. Instead, what we get in this Gospel is John's telling what happened when he baptized Jesus. According to John's testimony as it is recorded here, he received a revelation as the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus when he came up out of the water. He says that God spoke to him and confirmed Jesus's identity as the Chosen One. John is the first person to give a testimony, but a few verses later, a second person, Andrew, gives a testimony to his brother Peter when he tells him, "we have found the Messiah."

A testimony is something that every believer has. Some of you might have grown up in churches or around churches where it was part of the culture for people to regularly share testimonies. Presbyterians aren't always known for giving verbal, public testimonies about the origins of their faith, but Presbyterians *do* have testimonies because we do have stories about when faith became real to us and about where and how we have seen God's grace and activity in our lives. In this church we have practiced sharing

testimonies from time to time as I've asked some of you to share your stories about how you've seen God and recognized God at work in your lives, and those have been powerful stories. One thing that is true about these stories, and we see it in our text today, is that they are stories about how God reveals himself to us and we respond to that revelation with faith.

As we hear the story about John and Andrew giving their testimonies, it gives us an opportunity to reflect on our own stories, and that is something that's worth doing. Think about when, or why, or who, or what led you to believe, and think about what God was doing there. When we do this kind of reflection, it stirs up gratitude to God for giving us a revelation or the revelations that awakened faith in our hearts. It's also important to reflect on our own stories and to think about how to articulate them because there are people around us who might want to hear them, and they might want to hear them even if you don't think it's a very "exciting story" because they are looking for truth not excitement. People are curious about God, and God can use our testimonies as a means of revelation for the curious. That is a second thing we see happening in this passage which brings us to the next word. Curiosity.

We see curiosity in John's two disciples who heard his testimony and went after Jesus to investigate further. They were already following John so we know they were interested in what God was doing. They wanted to know more, and when John testified about Jesus, it nudged them toward the next step.

If we pay attention, there's a good chance that there is someone around us who is curious about God in some way. They may be curious about how it can be true that God is good if the world is so bad. They may have questions about Jesus himself, or questions about why Jesus is so important to you. They may be curious about why you come to church every Sunday, or about what your church is like. If we share what we have seen and heard with them like John did, our testimony might be the next step that then leads to the next step in their search. We can do this in very natural and normal ways – like if someone asks you directly why you believe, or what you believe, or how you came to believe. You just answer the question! It's just a conversation, and it doesn't need to be forced, but if and when it comes up naturally, we can be prepared to tell our stories if we have given some thought to how we would articulate them. There is something else, though, that a curious person might need or want from us even before they need or want to hear our testimony. It's a third thing we see happening in the passage. Our last word is hospitality.

When John's curious disciples go after Jesus, he doesn't respond to them with a lecture or demand an immediate decision from them. He just turns to them and extends an invitation to come and see. Come to the house where I'm staying. Spend some time with me. Listen to what I have to say and see what you think. There's no sense of pressure or fear. I love the warmth of Jesus's hospitality and the gentleness of his invitation, and in Jesus we see exactly what God is like. In Jesus we see that God is a God who moves toward us, and invites, and calls, but never forces or coerces or manipulates us.

Hospitality is something we can show in conversations by truly listening and showing respect to people. We can also show it by literally doing what Jesus did and inviting people into our homes or by

offering our time to spend with others. In our church, we can show hospitality, too, and by the way – as a reminder – hospitality is something that we have identified as one of our core values. “We are committed to showing warmth and hospitality to our visitors and invite everyone to draw near to Christ through our fellowship and worship.” How do we do that?

We can do it in the obvious ways by being welcoming and saying hello to people – those are the obvious ways – but there are other ways, too. We can anticipate that a person who is unfamiliar with church but curious about God might not know the words to the Lord’s Prayer so we print them in the bulletin. That’s an expression of hospitality. We offer room for people to come with their questions and uncertainties about God and faith. One of our other core values is Authenticity and one of the things we have articulated in the description of that value is that we believe that “each person’s journey unfolds in its own time and in unique ways. Because God’s grace meets us where we are, we can live with honesty and without fear or pretense. We offer one another patience, compassion, and understanding.” That is how we are authentic, but it’s also a way to be hospitable.

We have taken a few minutes to observe what’s happening in the Scripture and we’ve given some attention to these three words - testimony, curiosity, and hospitality, but the real question is why does any of this matter? I believe it does matter because what we see in John’s Gospel gives us a good idea of how God chooses to work in and through the lives of ordinary people like us to awaken faith in people’s hearts. It shows us how God works to expand and build the church – not for our own benefit – but so that the church can exist in the world as a community that bears witness to who God is and what God has done for the whole world in Christ. To be a Christian is to be a witness, and to be part of the Body of Christ is to be part of a

witnessing community, but we don't have to be afraid to live in to that part of our identity or uncomfortable about it. It doesn't mean that we are called to coerce, or control, or manipulate people so that we can build an organization that looks grand and impressive. It just means that we are called to share what we know and to practice inviting people to come near and see who this Jesus is and what he is all about.

If we circle back to John Bier, we can see from our own story as a church that God does work in the ways we've seen and talked about this morning. When those people with the clipboards came, John jumped at the opportunity to get out and invite his neighbors to come and see what God seemed to be doing in this neighborhood. Some people were curious, and some of those curious people came to see and then felt called to join in on what God was doing here. Over the years, this church has shown hospitality to newcomers, and here we are today. God is still present. Still working. Still choosing to use us to proclaim his gospel, show his love, and minister to others in his name.

We had our annual elder retreat yesterday and I think it's important for our church leaders to take time at the beginning of the year to think about where we've been and where we think God wants to take us next. There are always goals and ideas about what we want to accomplish which is good, but what we've heard today is a reminder that at the heart of it all, our purpose and our calling is always the same. We're here to point others to Christ. We're here to welcome all who want to come near, see him, and know him. We're here to let him and his love be made visible through us. Let's give ourselves to that purpose, and God will do the rest. Amen.