

Second Sunday after Epiphany

January 17, 2021

“Come and See”

1 Samuel 3:1-10 ~ 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 ~ John 1:43:51

I've shared this story with a few of you before, but it's one of my favorites so please bear with me if you've heard it. Several years ago, our family took a trip to the Grand Canyon. Because of limited parking we decided to leave our car in Flagstaff and join a bus group. Our guide was very knowledgeable, and he was especially mindful about our need to be aware of safety issues ... for very good reasons. The Grand Canyon is a mile-deep and 277 miles long. It is a monumentally grand sight to behold ... but it's fraught with danger.

And after the initial oohing and aahing subsides, many a casual visitor's thoughts turn to ... death. Our guide said that almost everyone asks him the same question ... “How many people accidentally fall over the edge every year?” And the deaths are not always accidental. There has been “suicide by canyon” – most spectacularly, perhaps, the *Thelma & Louise* copycats who gun their engines for a flying leap. And there has been “divorce by canyon” — “Back up just a little farther, honey, and I'll take your picture ...”

We had been there before, but it still knocked us out. Gazing into the chasm makes you feel small and insignificant and vulnerable. Well, maybe not *everyone does*. There were a variety of people on our bus ... many of them from foreign countries. For the most part they were just as excited as we were ... except for this one young couple from France. Mind you, I have nothing against the French ... but if ever a country wanted to make a really bad impression on others, these two should have been their ambassadors. They were both in their mid twenties ... impossibly thin ... incredibly chic ... incessantly smoking and invariably bored. At our first stop we were given instructions to meet back at the bus at a certain time. Everyone very courteously showed up right on schedule, except these two. She sauntered back about twenty minutes late, oblivious to the rest of us. When the guide wanted to know if everyone was back, she casually mentioned that her companion had not returned. Concerned, the guide wanted to know what he looked like and she turned to him disdainfully and said, “he looks like my bouy-friend.” When Mr. Wonderful finally graced us with his presence, off we went again. At our final stop I was behind them for a short time on the trail head. He got to the bottom step of the look-out, turned to her with a shrug and a sigh and said, “Just another pile of rocks....”

Just another pile of rocks! I wanted to grab them by the shoulders and shake them awake. I wanted to shout, “Don't you realize what happened here? Don't you understand what you are seeing? This canyon was carved out by the sheer force of water and time. This is one of the true wonders of the world. Don't you see that?” But of course, they didn't. They couldn't.

They were too busy believing that *they* were one of the true wonders of the world. They were, as Thomas Carlyle put it, "a pair of spectacles behind which there is no eye."

On the other hand, several others helped me to see things that I had not seen. The children were the most fun to watch of course. Turns out, even though we were all seeing the same thing, we each had different capacities for comprehending what our eyes beheld. And at some point, we all needed someone else's help to turn our view into vision.

Life is a lot like one of those puzzles I used to see in Highlights magazine when I was a child. You know, a picture of a living room in which twenty-five objects are hidden. Can you find them all? You probably wouldn't even notice if they didn't tell you they were there. What you see in life is greatly determined by what you are looking for. There is more ... so much more ... to every moment than we observe ... but we could observe more if we only stopped to look ... thought to ask ... "Where is God in this picture?" That is the message of Epiphany ... that God is manifest in the world around us ... that God is with us ... and to see ... we only need to look.

Jesus grew up in a dusty little town in the hills of Galilee. The whole area didn't amount to much more than another pile of rocks. Nazareth was not far from the shores of the Sea of Galilee. After his baptism by John in the Jordan, Jesus traveled to the villages along the shore ... Tiberias, Capernaum, Bethsaida. God came in human flesh ... in the specific flesh ... of a particular person ... from a particular place.

When he began his ministry, Jesus was just someone from Nazareth. He didn't glow in the dark, or soar like an eagle, or call thunderbolts from the sky to light his campfires. He was the glory of God *incognito*, in ordinary human flesh. No wonder most people didn't notice ... and didn't know what they were seeing. But he was there in plain sight ... they just weren't looking.

John the Baptist noticed first: "*Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!*" (John 1:29). How did John know? Was he helped by the vision and the voice at Jesus' baptism ... or did he see the vision and hear the voice precisely because he was tuned in to the presence of God in *his* life? John told two of his disciples, Andrew and Philip, "*Look, here is the Lamb of God!*" (John 1:36).

We all need guides at times ... those who are better trained ... more experienced ... more aware ... spiritual directors who can open our eyes to what is sitting in plain sight. The two disciples followed Jesus, and he asked them, "What are you looking for?" (John 1:38). Like all of Jesus' questions, it was loaded. He meant much more than "How can I help you?" He was asking, "What are you looking for in life?" "What are you longing for?" "What are your expectations ... and are you open to God's expectations and plans?" They asked where he was staying.

"Come and see," Jesus told them (John 1:39). Did he mean simply, "Come and see my place," or "Come and see how I live ... who I am ... who God is?"

Philip quoted him later. In the passages of John's Gospel that we heard today we learn that Philip went to his brother Nathaniel, and told him, "*We have found him ... about whom Moses in the law ... and also the prophets wrote ... Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth*" (John 1:45). A startling announcement from possibly a rather excitable brother ... perhaps not even the first time that he had announced that he had found the Messiah. Nathaniel laughed. Some guy from Nazareth ... that's ridiculous ... comical ... absurd! Nathaniel sounded like any one of us who have become prejudiced by the disappointments of life and have been made cynical by the false promises of spiritual con artists. "*Can anything good come out of Nazareth?*" he responds.

We all have our own prejudices, and we tend to react to good news warily, as those too sophisticated to be embarrassed again. A little skepticism is healthy after all. It protects us from harm. But we must also question our skepticism ... lest it harden into cynicism ... lest it keep us from opening our sails to the fresh breezes of God's Spirit. Nathaniel is not open to the possibility that the Promised One might come from so ordinary a place as Nazareth. Philip might as well have said, "We have found the Messiah and he comes from West Texas!" I have no qualms in saying that because I come from West Texas. But Nathaniel would have missed the Messiah had not Philip insisted. And Philip told Nathaniel the same thing Jesus had told him: "*Come and see*" (John 1:46). "Come and see."

God is all around us ... in the ordinary places ... in the unguarded moments ... in the flesh of those we don't even notice ... a grocery clerk ... a harried waiter ... a hungry child ... the person next to you in the pew today ... and even some guy from Nazareth, of all places. But we do not see God in these places ... in these moments ... in these people because we are not looking for God ... we are not mature enough or alert enough or experienced enough to see what is right there in plain sight before our eyes. "Come and see," Philip urged Nathaniel. But seeing takes time and energy. We must focus our attention ... look hard ... follow a while ... before the vision of God's glory shines through.

What is it that Jesus kept telling the disciples? "Let whoever has ears, hear. Let whoever has eyes, see." We cannot go by first impressions. It takes some discipline ... some commitment ... some consistent connection. Truth is, we don't follow Jesus because we *immediately* see him for who he is ... we follow in order to *see* who he is ... and across the years God is disclosed ever the more through our discipleship.

I like the pattern of discernment in these stories from our gospel today. Everyone is at different stages of seeing. Those who see point out what they see to those who cannot yet see. And surely, none of them yet sees all that will be in this man from Nazareth. But Jesus also sees

what no others can see in these stories, and points it out. Philip brings Nathaniel to meet Jesus, and Jesus says, "*Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!*" (John 1:47). Jesus beholds Nathaniel for who he is ... even in his cynicism ... that he will not stand for the lie ... and Jesus affirms his deepest being.

Earlier, Andrew brought his brother to meet Jesus, and Jesus said, "*You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas*" (John 1:42), or in the Greek, *Peter*, the Rock. Jesus beholds something in Peter that nobody else would ever believe about this impulsive blowhard of a sailor. He is a Rock. Does Jesus see this in Simon because it is there ... or does Simon become this because Jesus sees it in him? Turns out, it matters less what we see of God in the ordinary things around us ... than what God sees in our ordinary souls. Christ looks at you and me and he sees past where we are from. He sees the extraordinary possibility of what we may become with the Spirit of God at work in us. And he affirms us.

So, I say to you today, look around you. Look for God everywhere you go ... in every person you meet. Listen to God's opinion of you ... to what Jesus blesses in your being. Come and see what Jesus might make of you. We have found the Messiah! Can you believe it? He is from Nazareth! Come and see.

May we pray?

Lamb of God,

Open our eyes to the sight of you in the places and faces of our lives. Open our ears to the word of you in the voices of those proclaiming good news or crying for help. Open our hearts to the love of you poured out among us in our own flesh and blood. And let us come and see you for who you are. Let us come and see you in each other. Let us come and see you in ourselves, blessed and beloved of God just as we are, in all our ordinary humanity. Lamb of God, let us behold you! Amen.