

Come & See

On the Swiss Village campus, I have a wonderful space to call “my office.” Once a small, private dining area, this room now serves as the chaplain’s office. Besides being the only office in the entire complex to have a chandelier hanging from the ceiling, (!!) I enjoy two large windows which look over the pond in a westerly direction. In addition to the view of the park, a large bird feeder stands in a protected spot between my office windows and the large windows of the dining room. At this tall, well-stocked bird feeder there is never a dull moment. I enjoy the antics of the squirrels as they climb the tree, walking like tight-rope artists to the roof top and then springing from the eaves to land on the feeder. (Paul Nussbaum has tried everything to prevent the wily squirrels from getting to the feeder...but he is **always** out-manuevered! Out-smarted?!) Many small finches and sparrows flock to the feeder; on occasion, however, their feasting ends abruptly as a shadowy sparrow hawk glides in for a meal made – not of bird feed- but of feeding birds! Blue jays and mourning doves are usual guests and I am delighted by the predictability of their company.

It is, perhaps, only once or twice a month that a pair of cardinals comes to the feeder. I am thrilled when I catch a glimpse of brilliant red landing first on the bushes and then hopping onto the ledges of the bird feeder. My first thoughts upon sighting them... “I’ve got to call Jean.” Jean’s apartment shares a wall with my office and we see each other often as we come and go. On occasion, I step into her room. A curio cabinet is filled with beautiful life-like figurines – each one a representation of a cardinal. Jean loves cardinals, “redbirds,” as she calls them. When I see the cardinal couple at the feeder or in the bushes along the building, I immediately pause – seeking to make quiet, calm movements so that these bright visitors don’t flit up and over the rooftop – gone until they are prompted to return on another day. I don’t want to frighten them with sudden movements, but at the same time, I want to either slip out of my office to Jean’s door or reach for the phone.

Recently, the cardinals arrived and I carefully dialed Jean’s phone number. I said, “The cardinals are here.” She replied, “I’ll be right over.” Click -our phone conversation was complete. Jean came immediately – in her stocking feet- knowing that if she took too much time the birds would be gone. Their visits – spectacular - are also quite brief. Jean stood at the far window, savoring the beauty of the cardinals. I treasured the joy of her delight **and** the immediacy of her response when I said, “come and see!”

Think about the times when you’ve called out to someone to hurry, to “come and see.” Without conscious thought, when we experience something that stirs our soul, we call out, “come and see!” Come and see...an invitation filled with expectancy, with anticipation, with delight in the sharing. A cardinal couple, a rainbow on a stormy afternoon, the precious minutes of a winter sunrise or the soft sunsets of fall...the floating flakes of the most recent snow: I struggle to find words to tell you about them..., how much more I love to exclaim, “Come and see!”

Today's Gospel reading comes from John 1 with invitation to "come and see." "Come and see" something unexpected, something that is incredible, that is breathtaking. "Come and see" that which is indescribable, that which will change your life, because it has changed mine. "Come and see" so that this experience isn't only mine alone- it can't be mine alone! "Come and see" – because I can't begin to tell you about it!" "Come and see" because you will experience this encounter in your very own way, not just my way – and together there is even more to "come and see!"

Let's look into this account which offers us a glimpse into this invitation offered to and by early followers of Jesus. Let's look and see the invitation which continues to be offered to us.

The Gospel records right from the start, "No one has ever seen God." What a relief! Even though the Old Testament gives account of many "encounters" with God...no one was ever able to "see" God. (Our Sojourners Study group has just started conversation around the topic of "our images of God." The way we perceive of God, the way we think of God, the way we "see God," is foundational to our experience of God.) John offers to us this simple, comfortable word of assurance, "No one has ever seen God. It is Jesus the only Son, who is close the Father's heart, who has made him known." We know God as we see Jesus. Consider your image of God...does it look like Jesus?

In this first chapter of the Gospel, John the Baptist sees Jesus. – to the ones gathered around him, John declares, "Here is the Lamb of God...the Son of God..." John goes on to say that he *saw with his own eyes* the Spirit descending like a dove and resting on Jesus. John points his followers to Jesus, saying "look...this is the One." Two curious friends of John do go and look. Jesus asks them, "What are you looking for?" What a great question! Think about it! What influence do your expectations play when you are "looking for something?" How many times have you been looking for a simple object which you are sure was about "this high and this wide...and light blue in color..." only to discover weeks later when you stumbled upon it unexpectedly that it really wasn't as large as you remembered it to be and it happened to be red. You didn't see it because *you already knew what you were looking for and that limited what you were able to see!*

Jesus query to the disciples changes everything...as they follow him with images of messianic language whirling in their minds - Jesus turns to them and pointedly asks "What are you looking for?" This irresistibly unsettling question draws them closer. They wonder even more and find themselves inquiring where he is going to be staying. Who knows what they might have been imagining! Jesus responds, not with words of direction or address, but with words of invitation to "come and see." They did go and see

and they discovered something that they could never leave again. One who “went to see” was Andrew. Andrew was a brother to Simon who, upon acting upon Jesus’ invitation could not resist going to find his brother, wanting him, also, to come and see. Andrew brought Simon back to Jesus and whatever it was that Simon experienced changed his of life, his way of living forever.

“The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, ‘Follow me.’ Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanel and said to him, ‘We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth. Nathanel said to him, ‘Can anything good come out of Nazareth?’ Philip said to him ‘Come and see.’” No great doctrinal words or litmus test teachings – just a simple invitation to “come and see.” After Nathanel’s introduction to Jesus, his life, too, would never be the same.

The Gospels give us account of the disciples living encounters with Jesus – the Word become flesh. Yet, as Tig shared with us two weeks ago, the disciples of two thousand years ago weren’t simply the lucky ones who happened to share time and space with Jesus – God wasn’t with us- only for a few short years. The Word *is still* flesh and *still* dwells among us. The Spirit of Jesus, the Body of Christ, lives in this world – this world just as we know it to be – filled with beauty and brokenness. Jesus life has not only “happened,” it is happening and is filled with possibility for future happenings!

“The end of all Christian belief and obedience, witness and teaching, marriage and family, leisure and work life, preaching and pastoral work is the *living* of everything we know about God: life, life and more life. (it is not about...) information about God; it is a protest against... a program of strategic planning for God.”¹

Gerhard Manley Hopkins’ sonnet invites us to “come and see” Jesus in all that surrounds us:

As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame;
As tumbled over rim in roundy wells
Stones ring; like each tucked string tells, each hung bell’s
Bow swung finds tongue to fling out broad its name;
Each mortal thing does one thing and the same:
Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;
Selves – goes itself; *myself* it speaks and spells,

¹ Eugene Petersson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places: A Conversation in Spiritual Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm Eerdmans Publishing Co. 2005), pg.1.

Crying *What I do is me; for that I came.*

I say more: the just man justices;
Keeps grace: that keeps all his goings graces;
Acts in God's eye what in God's eye he is-
Christ. For Christ plays in ten thousand place,
Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his
To the Father through the features of men's face.²

In our time and in this very place... and other times and other places... Jesus is among us... "In God's eye what in God's eye we are"... Christ to one another... for "Christ plays in ten thousand places" each and every day... ten thousand places, ten thousand times... Jesus plays...

- In the pleading eyes of a woman –old and finished with life, yet not able to die
- In the faithful visits of friends and family who journey with her- defying what seems to her as "meaninglessness"
- Through the hands of the gardener whose greenhouse is filled with sprouts and smelling of fertile earth while the outside temperature falls to -15 F.
- In the sound of Louise's laughter and song; Tig's lively story-telling; in the love we share in a myriad of relationships; in the joy of trusted friendship.
- In a church who continues to proclaim "Everyone Welcome" even after a person angry with those who would "be soft on terror" kills and traumatizes members of the congregation. (Chris Buice, pastor,- a graduate of ESR)
- On the wings of a disabled airliner in the frigid Hudson River –with no accounting required of political, religious or any other "persuasion."
- In the hope of a better future for humanity as the US looks to inaugurate a new way of leadership
- Here in our dear congregation... which shares in life together in a way which words cannot describe.

In our time and in this place - oh yes - we do see Jesus! May we lightly and expectantly ever welcome the Spirit of Jesus within and among us! May we succumb to the irresistible love of God which draws us into the living mystery of Jesus. Our hearts burn within us - may we live lives of invitation –which can't help but exclaim...

"Come and See!"

² Ibid, pg.2.