

COME AND SEE THE LAMB OF GOD

John 1:29-42

The first half of today's Gospel lesson shares John the Baptist's testimony about Jesus – *Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!* The second half of our Gospel passage has to do with invitations to meet and encounter Jesus. "*Come and see*" summarizes the 2nd half of this Gospel passage. I'd like to invert today's Gospel passage, looking at the 2nd half and then the first half.

In the 2nd half of this Gospel passage John the Baptist points the way to Jesus to Andrew who points the way to Simon-Peter his brother. As the story continues Jesus next meets Philip who brings Nathanael – a friend from his home town in Bethsaida – to meet Jesus. And on and on it goes, in an unbroken chain from the original 12 to new disciples and more new disciples... an invitation to *come and see*, to come face to face with the person of Jesus. That unbroken chain continues through many links from Jesus to the disciples to you and me. I call it invitational evangelism.

Come and see. That's easy for us to say right now, because we are excited to show people our newly renovated parish house. *Come and see* our renovations. *Come and see* our beautifully restored stained glass windows. And I hope we do invite people to *come and see* the fruit of our hard work and vision and capital campaigning and planning in *St. John's Rising*. That's a good thing.

But more important than showing off our beautiful newly renovated building I hope we, like those first disciples, will invite people to come and see Jesus. *Come and see Jesus* in the work and ministry of his church.

- *Come and see Jesus* enthroned on the prayers and praises of his people in joy-filled, song-filled, prayer-filled worship. Worship that is filled with the beauty of holiness and shared in the rich tradition of Anglican worship.
- *Come and see Jesus*, God's living Word, as members of our parish gather to break open the scriptures and study to connect God's Word to their lives. Come on Monday nights to study the Acts of the Apostles. Come on Thursday mornings to study the Gospel of Luke. Come to a new Bible study on Wednesday evenings being formed at the home of Linda and Stephen Clapp to look ahead at the lectionary readings, which we will read on the following Sunday.
- *Come and see Jesus* as he is shared in Godly Play story telling with our children.
- *Come and see Jesus* as we meet him in acts of help and service to people in need.
 - *Come and see Jesus* as we bring flowers to him from the altar.
 - *Come and see Jesus* and have Holy Communion with him as our Lay Eucharistic Visitors bring the bread and wine to be shared with the home bound and as the clergy visit him in the hospital.
 - *Come and see Jesus* in the children who are able to enjoy a warm lunch and receive an education and receive medical treatment thanks

to our partnership with the Good Samaritan School and clinic in L'Acul, Haiti

- *Come and see Jesus* enjoying a special meal with his family thanks to our Thanksgiving boxes or Christmas doves or Easter baskets.
 - *Come and see Jesus* and his friends fed at St. Luke's Lifeworks
 - *Come and see Jesus* living in a box on a back alley of NYC but at least having a tooth brush and comb and comfy and warm in clothes, coat and blanket donated through the Midnight Run.
 - *Come and see Jesus* helped through dozens of social service agencies throughout Stamford through the grants of St. John's Foundation
- *Come and see Jesus* in the people and life and ministry of St. John's Church. As we have described our parish in the past – “*a place to find and be found by Christ.*”

“*What are you looking for?*,” we might well ask a friend who is searching, or a neighbor, or a family member or someone at our place of work. “*Peace,*” they may reply, or “*hope,*” or “*someplace I can make a difference,*” “*healing,*” “*forgiveness,*” “*someplace where people know my name and care about me,*” “*something I can believe in,*” “*a community where my child can grow in faith,*” “*a spiritual home.*” “*Come and see*” is the invitation with which we can reply. People followed Jesus then, much as they do today, because someone invited them to *come and see*.

Unlike those first disciples who invited people regularly, Episcopalians tend to be pretty reticent about inviting friends to come and experience worship with them. I hope we've improved since this statistic was published, but I read 26 years ago that Episcopalians on the average invite someone new to come to church with them once every 28 years.

Who have you invited lately? Who could you invite to come to worship with you next Sunday? Who could you invite to come to a Bible study or prayer group? Who could you invite to the organ concert this afternoon? Who could you invite to come with you to the place where you volunteer to serve Christ through serving those in need? Invitational evangelism starts with an invitation. Maybe someone is waiting for your invitation for them to *come and see*.

I have spoken about how we might invite people to *come and see Jesus* through the ways Jesus' living presence is *realized* in our worship, our prayers, our fellowship, our study and service to others. We represent Christ. As God became flesh in the incarnation, the Church incarnates the living presence of Christ. The 16th Century Spanish mystic, Teresa of Avila wrote in her famous poem,

Christ has no body now on earth but yours,
no hands but yours,
no feet but yours,
Yours are the eyes through which to look out
Christ's compassion to the world;

Yours are the feet with which he is to go about doing good;
Yours are the hands with which he is to bless men now.

And in one sense that living presence of Christ in us is what we are inviting people to *come and see*. But in another sense that isn't it at all, for Christ is beyond us. We represent Christ but we are not Christ. At best we point to him. At worst we misrepresent him, badly.

A seminary professor wrote about a period in his life when he particularly overcommitted and stressed. A colleague took him out to lunch and said it was urgent. When they sat down he asked her what was going on. She said that she had some good news for him. She smiled and told him, "*I want you to know that the Messiah has come!*" He was thoroughly confused; was this the point of an urgent lunch? She then said that she had even better news; "*your not him!*" (Rodger Nishioka, *Feasting on the Word, Year A, Volume 1*, pg. 264) And that is good news indeed, the Messiah has come and neither you or I are him.

Like John the Baptist in the beginning part of this morning's Gospel our job is to witness to Jesus, to point to him. We may as St. Teresa put in her famous poem, represent Jesus but we should never confuse ourselves or our work or our church with him. The good news is that the Messiah has come and we are not him.

Our role, like John the Baptist's, is to recognize and point to the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. In the Old Testament system of sacrifice only an unblemished lamb would be offered to God in sacrifice for our sins. Jesus is that perfect sacrifice once for all times. We have a beautiful image of the Lamb of God in the large rose window in the north transept. Jesus is the Lamb who took our place upon the cross. The banner the lamb carries represents the resurrection. The lamb is triumphant. Roses and lilies alternate in a circle around the lamb, symbols of purity and resurrection. His love is what we point to. His gift is what brings us life. We invite people to *come and see* in order that we might point to him, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.