

Pastor Jon's Sermon from Saturday/Sunday, January 18-19.

Text: John 1:29-42

"Come and See"

One of the benefits of living in a home with a three year old is I get invited to do many things. Marcella is a master inviter. She will take me by the hand and lead me downstairs or upstairs and say, "Daddy, do you want to play with me?" and pat the ground next to her. Or when tucking her in at night she will say, "Daddy, do you want to lay with me?" and pat the pillow next to her. On the way to taking the kids to school in the morning she will point up in the sky and say, while I'm driving, "Daddy, look, the moon!" and of course I look for the moon. One of my favorites is she will lift her glass of juice at the table and say "cheers".

Marcella teaches me how to invite someone to experience something she is excited about. I think the church could benefit from the example of a child inviting us into their world? We should be excited about the gifts of grace we receive in knowing Christ.

In our Gospel lesson for today from John's Gospel, John the Baptist, says to his disciples when he saw Jesus coming toward him, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" John then proceeded to tell the disciples about Jesus... about the time he baptized Jesus, and how the Spirit descended on Jesus like a dove, and how he declared that Jesus is the Son of God. John witnessed to Jesus. And John knew his job was coming to an end... of preparing others to meet the Messiah.

Then, the next day John saw Jesus walk by again and said to his disciples, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!" The disciples then left John and started following Jesus. How unselfish of John, releasing his disciples to follow Jesus.

When Jesus turned and saw he had two new disciples following him, said to them, "What are you looking for?" The two disciples called Jesus "Rabbi", essentially saying, you are now our teacher. They asked Jesus, "Where are you staying?" Jesus said, "Come and see." This invitation of Jesus sets off a chain reaction. Andrew, one of

John's disciples, after spending a day with Jesus, went to find his brother Simon and proclaimed, "We have found the Messiah." Then Andrew physically brought Simon to meet Jesus. And typical to John's Gospel, Jesus already knew who Simon was, that he was John's son, and gave him a new name of Cephas, which is translated as Peter.

What are you looking for today as you come to church? What would be good news to you today? Do you long for an encounter with the Messiah that sends you out to invite others to come and see? That's the hope in going to church and of our faith.

What about the fact that Jesus is your Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world? As humans, we continuously do the very things we hate, as Paul describes. We turn away from God and our neighbors. We say things we shouldn't. We don't say things we should. We see only what we want to see and ignore the needs of others. We are selfish by nature. We put ourselves and other things above God.

What have you done this week that you are not proud of? Who did you hurt either to their face or behind their back? Have you been kind to yourself? Well I have good news for you. Jesus is the Lamb of God who that takes away your sin. You are forgiven. You are redeemed. As baptized children of God, your sins don't define you. Your failures don't rule you.

Mr. Rogers, not Aaron, but Fred Rogers from 'Mister Rogers Neighborhood', who was a Presbyterian Pastor once said, "There's a part of all of us that longs to know that even what's weakest about us is still redeemable and can ultimately count for something good." You are redeemable and count for something good.

Come and see! In the year 2000 on a Holy Land Study Tour with Wartburg Seminary, we got to meet with Father Elias Chacour in the Galilee Region of Israel. Father Chacour listened to his parishoners and started a school with one grade, kindergarten, as a Melkite Catholic Priest in the church he was assigned to. The next year he added a grade and so on. Now there is a university called the Mar Elias Education Institution that welcomes Muslims, Christians, and

Jewish students and teachers to learn in the same institution. Chacour believed that education was the way to peace in the Middle East. He was nominated a few times for the Nobel Peace Prize. We named our Son Elias after him.

Nevertheless, when we met him with our tour group, he asked us a pointed question. Did you find him? I repeat, “Did you find him?” He was talking about Jesus. “The tomb is empty.” He said you won’t find him here in the dead stones... the archeological sites. You will find him in the living stones. In the people.

Then it clicked for me. One holy site or shrine bled into another. I couldn’t remember one site from the next. But when I visited the Gaza strip and visited a Muslim all-girl’s school, I understood what Father Chacour was saying. We were invited to an English Class to dialogue with these high school girls. Many of them had hope of leaving the Gaza strip to pursue their education. But it was hard to leave as a Palestinian with the government policies.

When you listen to people stories, when you hear of injustices in the world, you are called into something greater than yourself. Jesus’ invitation to come and see reminds me of Matthew 25 when Jesus says, what you do to the least of these you have done unto me. When you visit someone, feed, clothe.

One of our youth shared a testimony the other night at Youth Group about going on the mission trip to Texas last year to Camp Noah. Hearing him describe this experience really spoke to me. I could tell it changed him and drew him deeper into his faith. He described a little girl he met that didn’t have much. But she taught him about still finding joy despite all the losses in her life. His identity will forever be tied to this trip and this little girl’s story.

Coming to church is one thing, but meeting Christ in church in the Word, Proclamation of the Gospel, and in communion is another thing. That is the hope in going to church, that we meet Jesus. We are called to invite others to come and see for themselves. And like Peter, they will find out that Jesus already knows them and calls them by name to invite others.

Like Marcella and our youth, may we experience excitement in knowing that Jesus meets us in simple things like water and word, in bread and wine... that we are truly forgiven and redeemed. And that God calls us to go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

This week, invite someone to church. When you see Jesus in your daily life, pat a chair or the ground and invite them to see for themselves. Tell others your stories of how knowing Jesus helps you in your daily life. You don't have to use big churchy words. Just be yourself. You never know how the Spirit can use you.

Amen!