

"Come and See"

Our Gospel story for today actually has its beginnings in last week's story of the baptism of Jesus. We didn't read it from the Gospel of John, so the story we hear is a little different than what we would read in this Gospel, but it is important to recognize that John the Baptist plays a huge role in today's story of Jesus calling the disciples. In John's Gospel, the first disciples called are disciples of John before they choose to follow Jesus. After his baptism, Jesus invites John's disciples Andrew and Simon Peter to "Come and see," and then spends the afternoon and evening talking with them.

Moving to today's text, Philip is the next disciple to be called and is from Bethsaida, the same town as Andrew and Peter. Philip then finds his friend, Nathanael, and tells him of the discussions they have all been having, and he is certain that this man Jesus is the one for whom the Israelites have been waiting. "Come and see!" he cries to his friend, and off they go.

John the Baptist begins the movement toward Jesus; Jesus begins to invite others...who invite others...who invite still others. Word of mouth communication brings people to Jesus' side where he can teach and tell the stories of what the reign of God will look like. Today we might text it...tweet it...or post it on our Facebook or webpage, inviting people to come and creating a flash mob.

In Jesus' day the communication was all first person, but any way the communication happens, it is story by story, teaching by teaching, that gives energy to the Jesus Movement then and now. "Come and see," the disciples tell their friends and their families, with an urgency that brings in ever greater crowds. "Come and see" is what we must learn to do all over again to keep the Jesus movement alive in our own day.

Last week, Pastor Larry said that Jesus did not put structures in place to build the church; instead, he traveled around the country seeing into the hearts of those who came to see and hear what he had to say. A movement of followers began to grow and tell the message as each heard it and experienced it. The followers were changed, transformed by the love of God, and they became passionate about Jesus' teachings; they told others...who told others. "Come and see!" they cry out, and they mean for people to understand just what Jesus' teachings about God's love means to them.

That's what happens to movements--they begin with a leader who passionately shares a transformative story with a few people. Those followers tell others...who tell others...who tell others...and the movement grows exponentially. We can watch it happen down through the ages, and each generation often seeks to reclaim the passion of the original leader as the movement gets bogged down in rules and greater numbers.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was one of those kinds of leaders. He grew up with the teachings of Jesus running through his heart, hearing especially the stories about freedom and justice for all God's children. He brought life to those teachings, giving voice to them through the use of vivid metaphors and powerful speech. Then he taught people to speak the truth plainly in places of power where they could not be ignored. He taught not only a message but a method of seeking change that used the teachings of Jesus and Gandhi and his understandings of non-violent action.

This weekend is the time that our country has set aside to remember this amazing man and the movement he birthed which transformed our country. Friday offered a powerful way for some of us from First Church to hear--and tell--some of those stories. Several of us went to the MLK breakfast together and listened to Larry Williams, the Executive Director of the Malone Center and a member of this church talk about his life and experiences with the teachings of

Martin Luther King. Oscar Harriott led the gathered community singing "Lift Every Voice and Sing," and "This Little Light of Mine," important songs in the Civil Rights movement. There were powerful moments as what MLK called "the Beloved Community" gathered to tell the story of today's work of raising money for scholarships was done.

It was a powerful way to begin the day, and that could even have been good enough for the day...but there was much more to see and hear. A little bit before noon we went to the state capital rotunda and listened to speeches of people whose lives had been touched by this man and the movement he helped start. Particularly powerful were the essays written and read by the students as they claimed their own dreams made possible because of MLK's dreams; one of those students was Ashley Carnge, who had been a Sunday School student of Marcee Seng here at First Church.

Those were all great moments, but then came the moment that had made me want to "Come and see" this year's program; we all had the opportunity to applaud our own Coleen Seng when she was given the Humanitarian award. We celebrate with her the work she has done over the years that has made a difference for people in Lincoln and around the state.

Coleen then had the opportunity to speak about the things that had shaped her into the "servant leader" she was named to be and to lift up her hopes and dreams for the future. Coleen told us about her visit to Washington, D.C. to visit her newest granddaughter, Eleanor. Both on the way into town and out again, Coleen and Marcee went past the new Martin Luther King, Jr. memorial. Coleen celebrated that Eleanor would grow up in a place where this amazing man would be so visible.

"Come and see!" the disciples were invited. It is an invitation to join with people who have been touched by something extraordinary, often something that cannot be explained or described to another. It is often a call that pulls us away from something quite ordinary and into an experience of something special or unique--as when my husband John will invite me to stop working for the moment to come and see an amazingly beautiful sunset or rising moon. It is an invitation to experience something that words cannot begin to explain.

During Epiphany we are exploring what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, especially one who will participate in transforming the world. In our text today we hear that we are both to listen for the invitation to join Jesus...and to invite others to come and see just what God is doing in our midst.

When Larry and I first started serving First Church, we marveled at just what a good secret this church is in the Lincoln community. There is so much amazing work that God is doing in this place through the work of your many hands. I remember my first sermon here, preaching in a style that was not familiar to you, and how you welcomed me and invited me to continue to share my faith in the ways that worked best for me. Whether you are involved in the music program, participate/design the Peacemaking Workshop, study with Companions in Christ, UMW, First Quilts, CrossTalk, Golf League, Scouting, Matt Talbott, Backpack program, Community organizations...or myriad other groups in the church, you are a part of the work of God in this community. Continue to tell your story in the way that works best for you.

I encourage you to keep finding ways of sharing some of these opportunities with others. I'm not asking you to boast about what happens here; I am asking you to find ways of sharing your love of God and your care of others with those in your life who might be looking for ways to make a difference in the lives of others. Begin by reflecting on the ways that God is already active in your life; how have you been transformed by the love and grace of God? And, once you

know something in your life that has been transformative, ask yourself who needs to hear your story.

This is a community that has practiced sharing the stories of Jesus Christ in such a way that people have truly been transformed. That is a truly amazing and wonderful thing. But we must learn to not keep this a secret! Invite others to "come and see" the way that God works in our lives here. And if you feel that you have yet to experience the love of God in this powerful way, seek out someone here who exemplifies the love of God and ask to hear their story--I promise that all will be blessed by those exchanges!

How is God working in your life? Think about it--and learn to tell the story. Invite others to "come and see" that they, too, might be touched by the love of God...and be transformed. Amen.