

“Come and See!”
Text: John 1: 29-42

Prayer: God of wisdom, open our hearts and minds to understand this challenging passage before us. We ask for your guidance. Amen.

Last Sunday, we heard Matthew’s version of the Baptism of Jesus. Today, we jump to John’s gospel, taking us to the day after Jesus is baptized. That very day, John the Baptist was standing with two of his disciples when Jesus walked by. It seems to me that in this story, John doesn’t know much about Jesus, even though Luke tells us that they were related. He says to his followers, “Look, here is the Lamb of God.” What could the writer of John’s gospel mean when he calls Jesus the Lamb of God?

In our lectionary group this past Tuesday, we had a very rich discussion about this image of Jesus as the Lamb of God. I will take this opportunity to share with you the group’s interpretations of this imagery as possible options or additions to your own. I’m sure many of you have been taught in Sunday School or through sermons that Jesus as the Lamb of God means that Jesus is one who was crucified on our behalf and, through his death, the sins of all human beings – past, present and future were all forgiven. You see, the ancient Jewish people sacrificed animals as an offering for their wrong doings or sins. It was their belief that animal sacrifice was a way to restore a broken relationship with God. The animals were sacrificed and burnt on the altar, and in that way the relationship between God and the sinner was restored. The one who brought the sacrifice was reconciled to God. But here’s the thing. Animals used for this kind of sacrifice were bulls, goats, birds or rams. They did not use lambs or young sheep as a sacrifice. So, to think of Jesus as a sacrificial lamb dying for your sin and my sin is a complete misinterpretation of Jesus, as the Lamb of God.

What about looking at a different story in the Bible that would make this symbolic title of Jesus more sense or relevant for our understanding? The lamb is a significant animal for the nation of Israel. It was a symbol at the very first Passover, when God, according to the Exodus story, struck a final blow at the Egyptians in order to save the people of Israel. The blood of lamb was used to paint the doors of the Israelites so that the angel of death would pass over them. Passover is the time when all Jewish families and communities come together to re-tell and re-

live the story of the Exodus. A story that tells how God freed them from the horrible slavery under the Egyptians. Passover is a celebration when the Jewish people remember who they are and where they are in the one big story of God. In this context, the Passover lamb, served as the main course, is not a sacrifice for sin but a symbol of promise. A reminder of restoration. A sign of protection from tragedy. Jesus as the Lamb of God brings “hope for new life and new beginnings, a calm, peaceful presence in the midst of tragedy and storms.”

Well, that changes things, doesn't it? And it changed the way Andrew and the other disciples saw Jesus. Both followed Jesus from a distance. And Jesus turned around to face them, broke the silence by saying “What are you looking for?” A question that could be said in many different ways: What do you seek? What are you after? What do you want? What do you need? It is a question worth wrestling with--as individuals, as congregations, as communities. What are you looking for? Jesus asked this profound question, a difficult question. It is one that exists in every life – both individual and communal. It is, however, a question we sometimes avoid or deny, because to face our deepest longings, to acknowledge the emptiness within, to inquire about what is of ultimate importance, that which shapes and forms our lives, is just too risky. It means we would have to get real, to be honest, to be vulnerable and open.

What are you looking for? Comfort? Healing? Affirmation? Friendship? Peace of mind?
Answers to your questions? Justice?

The disciples did not answer Jesus' question. In fact, they responded with another question which I find odd. “Rabbi, where are you staying?” Yes, it's a question alright, but it also gives us some answers. For one, the fact that they call Jesus Rabbi tells us that they must have felt that Jesus may have the answers to their questions. They saw Jesus as someone with authority – someone who they could look up to as a leader. Where are you staying? “May we invite ourselves to know you better?” They are hoping for the chance to spend some quality time with Jesus. Having heard so much about him, they are now looking forward to seeing themselves. They want to know his character, to hear what he has to say. They want to talk through their questions, their problems, their troubles, their longings, their hungers. Rabbi, where are you staying? They are not asking Jesus for the location of his home or his mailing address. The

disciples are not looking for just small casual talk, or more introductions. They are looking for a new way of life. Where are you staying? Where can we find you? Where shall we go to be with you, to receive what you have to offer? Where can we be in the very presence of God? They were actually looking for an invitation. They were seekers like you and I and did not find what they were looking for until they found Jesus. The disciples stumble along, following without knowing where they are going, discovering well after the fact that they have wandered onto a path that leads to a new way of life. “Where are you staying?” What will home look like if we hang out with you?

Jesus doesn't let the disciples down. Jesus calls out to them with this response: “Come and see.”

Come and see! And the two disciples went and saw. They stayed with him for one and a half days. And his story became their way of life. “Come and see,” --- and the disciples soon tasted water turned into wine; watched in wonder as Jesus cleared the temple; were disturbed when Jesus asked for water from a Samaritan woman. They stumbled onto a way of life they had never imagined. A gracious invitation is extended - one that comes with a promise like: Seek and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened for you. Ask and you will receive. Come to me and I will give you rest. “Come and see.”

While we don't know exactly how the evening was spent, we do know that, for Andrew, it changed everything. And John's account here makes clear that Andrew's time with Jesus was transformational. The first chance he gets, Andrew races to tell his brother. “Simon,” he says, “we have found the Messiah! Come and see, Simon! We have found the Christ!” “Come and see.”

And so as the story unfolds, we are also drawn in by the invitation to “come and see” for ourselves. We are invited to see where Jesus - the Lamb of God stays.

Come and see this Jesus, who creates abundance where there has been scarcity, so that all may eat their fill.

Come and see this Jesus, who embraces children and talks to women and empowers them.

Come and see this Jesus, who heals the brokenhearted, feeds the hungry, clothed the naked.

Come and see this Jesus, who weeps because of human suffering.

Come and see this Jesus, who washes the feet of his friends.

Come and see this Jesus, who insists that weapons be put away, even in the face of violence and arrest.

Come and see this Jesus, who embodies the love of God among us.

Come and see this Jesus, who prays fervently for the world to heal.

Come and see this Jesus, love made flesh, this Jesus who is nothing like the violent and corrupt movers and shakers of the empire.

This Jesus – this Lamb of God embodies the values of a different kind of community, the beloved community of God. This is the Jesus who is justice, who is love, who is kindness, who is compassion. Perhaps it is time to change our vision statement to these words: “Come and see! All are welcome! Go and tell!”. Amen.

As a point of reflection, I would like you to ponder these questions: What do we see in our communities? On our way to work, to school? Are we inviting others to come and see? Do we feel like children, tugging on the hand of someone — to come and see my new toy or my new pet? Are there places we need an invitation to see? What aspects of BCUC life and ministry would you invite others to “come and see”?