

Come and See – Experience Christ **FIRSTHAND** – A Sermon on John 1:29-42a

“He said to them, ‘Come and you will see.’”

Those are probably familiar words for most of us. I don’t just mean in the context of today’s gospel (*John 1:29-42*). Even if you’ve never read or heard today’s gospel you’ve probably both heard and spoken those words.

How many times have you heard your child or grandchild say, “Come and you will see?” “Come and you will see my drawing!” “Come and you will see this bug!” “Come and you will see what I made!” There was excitement and joy in their voice, maybe even a sense of urgency. Their words were an invitation to share in their discovery, to experience their world, and to participate in their life. It was the invitation to let your life and theirs come together as one.

That’s why you can’t just sit back and say, “No, just tell me about it.” That’s not an acceptable answer. They know that information and relationship are not interchangeable. They are not the same thing. “No, I’m **not** going to tell you,” they will say. “You **have** to Come - and you will see.” In those moments there is only one thing to do; get up and go look.

If you haven’t heard a child say, “Come and you will see,” maybe you remember saying it yourself when you were a child. Something happened and you just couldn’t keep it to yourself. “Come and you will see,” you yelled. You wanted that other person to enter into and be a part of – and witness to - your life. It’s not just kids that say that. Adults say it too. We invite our spouse, a best friend, a trusted colleague to “Come and you will see” our work and accomplishments, to “Come and you will see” our pain and struggles, to “Come and see” our life. Not only that but we also want to be invited to come and see theirs. At some level these are moments of epiphany, moments when God reveals his life in us and among us.

It may be easier to see this in kids but it’s in us Adults as well. It’s not a function of age but a function of simply being human. We never outgrow the desire to invite and to be invited, to share our life with another in a deep and meaningful way, and to participate in something larger than ourselves. That’s a part of our having been created in the image and likeness of God.

Jesus knows that about us and about God. That's why He does not give a direct answer to the disciples' question when they ask, "*Where are you staying?*" He does not offer information, he invites relationship and **experience**. "*Come and you will see.*"

That invitation is the antidote to the ways in which we too often live vicarious lives. Too often we allow political agendas, talk radio, surveys, news and even Social Media to tell us what to think rather than to help us engage and experience our world. We **settle** for church leaders telling us what to believe, rather than pointing us to experience Christ and opening the doors to the mystery of Jesus' presence in our lives. We idolize what others have, what they do, and who they **are**, rather than discovering the unique ways in which God reveals himself in and through our own lives. We are living secondhand lives and dying from a **secondhand** faith.

A **secondhand** faith can neither sustain nor transform life. That happens only by **firsthand** experience. Think about it for just a minute. Would you rather be told how pretty the sunset was or be drenched in the pinks, oranges, and purples of the evening sky? Would you rather hear a love story or fall in love and live a love story? Would you rather read a travel brochure or actually travel to – and experience – a new land? Would you rather know about Christ, or experience Him? That's the difference between a secondhand faith and a firsthand experience. Our relationship with Christ, with one another, and with ourselves **cannot** be based on a secondhand faith. It must be a firsthand experience.

A firsthand experience will NOT let us stay where we are. It moves us to a new place. It opens our eyes to a new reality. It turns our life in a different direction. It gives, grows, and sustains life in a way that secondhand faith never will. The deepest and most profound firsthand experience is Jesus Christ Himself. In each of our lives He comes toward us. His coming is always a moment of realization – moved by the Holy Spirit. We must realize whether we will be spectators of or participants in His life. That was the realization that John the Baptizer set before his disciples. Spectating – or Participating.

John "*was standing with two of his disciples, and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, 'Behold, the Lamb of God!'*" It was their moment of realization - of being moved by the Spirit. Would they stay, or would they go? Would they settle for a secondhand faith, information and facts about Jesus, or would they be moved to realize a firsthand experience of Christ and His life?

If they are moved to a firsthand experience, then... they will have to **leave** John behind. They will have to **let go** of that which is familiar, comfortable, and known. They will have to open themselves to something new and something different. You can probably remember times like that in your own life... It can be difficult to **let go** of a secondhand faith and life. It usually means there will be more questions than answers. Jesus asks, *What are you seeking?* And they said to Him, *Where are you staying?* Those are not so much questions to be answered as they are experiences waiting and wanting to be **lived!** A firsthand experience invites us to discover the answers by living the questions.

Are you one who has heard the invitation to ‘*Come and you will see.*’ Are you bound and determined to get up and go look. Are you one who will not be denied a **first-hand** experience of Christ? Firsthand experiences are not determined by - or conditioned on - our life’s circumstances. They arise from God’s eternal longing for and love of each one of us. Drawn by the Holy Spirit, in every circumstance of our life, good or bad, desired or dreaded, Jesus is calling us to Himself...
“Come and you will see.”

Hmmm... Think how different today’s gospel would be if Jesus had just answered their question of, *“Where are you staying?”* with a response of “Oh, it’s just a couple miles down this road. Second house on the left.” What do we do with that? How does that change anything? What difference does it make if we are given Jesus’ address, and then we are not invited in. We might as well stay where we are. But that is NOT how Jesus responds.

Jesus offers more than his address. *“Come and you will see,”* he says. There is reassurance and promise in his words. That means that he has something **for** us. It means that he is opening himself to us and inviting us **in**. He has gone ahead of us and prepared a place for us. Regardless of what is going on in our life, he makes it safe to move forward and take the next step in confidence that His life and His presence awaits us. *“Come and you will see”* is His invitation to find our true selves and discover our true lives.

So... How has the Holy Spirit been working in your heart and life recently? How has the Spirit been moving you? I wonder what Jesus wants to show you? In what ways does He want to share His life with you? How might He be offering Himself to you, asking you to participate in His life? Look at your life. What do you see? What does it look like?

Jesus Christ lived a human life. He knows every experience you and I could have. He Gets Us. He has gone before us, to blaze the trail through the unknown and uncertainty, even unto Death on the Cross – for us. Experienced the grave for us. Descended into Hell for us. And preaches the good news to those captive to Sin, Death and Satan, leading them – and us – to the promised land, with eternal life. We have only to follow Him in His Resurrection. Knowing of His ascension, we confess that He sits at the right hand of the Father - and that He will come again – bringing us to Himself!

Could you be like Andrew, going to tell your brother Simon, “*We have found the Messiah (which means Christ)*”? We can imagine if Andrew were thinking “How Can I Help my brother Experience Christ?” and then saying to Simon with excitement and urgency, “Come and you will see!”.

However you might describe your life or current situation, Jesus’ response is always the same. Is your life full and abundant? “*Come and you will see.*” Empty and desolate? “*Come and you will see.*” Filled with change, chaos, or the unknown? “*Come and you will see.*” Is it one of joy and celebration? “*Come and you will see.*” One of loss and sorrow? “*Come and you will see.*” Do you feel lost and confused? “*Come and you will see.*” Is it smooth sailing? “*Come and you will see.*” Is it weighed down by guilt, shame, despair? “*Come and you will see.*” Wrought by anxiety and fear, uncertain about your future? Jesus invites you to “*Come and you will see.*”

Every life and every situation echoes with that invitation from Jesus, “*Come and you will see.*” He is **here**, offering Himself, as the firsthand experience of your truest self your truest life. Don’t just take my word for it. Don’t believe it just because I said so. Don’t just sit there and ask me to tell you about it. Get up, go look for yourself and See... Experience Christ and what Jesus has invited you into...

His true Body and His true Blood are here - available for you; given for you, with the assurance of sins freely forgiven and with the steadfast love He continues to shower upon us. Experience Christ!

Even. Now. Today! “*Come and you will see.*”

In Jesus’ Name. AMEN.