

“Come and See”

Introduction: A few weeks ago, Thursday, January 2, to be exact, I did what I often do on a Thursday and that is to head over to the Gordon College Bennett Center and swim for a while. Usually, that’s an enjoyable experience. Only on this particular day, swimming was a challenge. Even though the students were still home on break, the pool was packed beyond what I had ever remembered. There were two swimmers in each lane, and several people sitting on benches waiting for a half a lane to open. Then it hit me: It was the day after New Year’s, the day after all sorts of people had made new year’s resolutions, many of which have to do with transforming our bodies in some way, and they had come to the pool to begin to carry these resolutions out! Sadly, whether our resolutions have to do with better fitness, better money management, or being better parents, spouses, or children, research reveals that the majority of us will abandon our new year’s resolves by the middle of this month.

Being followers of Jesus, we know and should understand the desire for transformation. But we also need to be aware that such does not happen through grim determination or sheer willpower. Instead, transformation begins to be possible when we come to understand the depth of love that God has for us through the cross of Jesus Christ and the power he makes available to us through the Spirit whom he sends. The invitation to follow Jesus, that we see in our text for this morning, is an invitation to begin to feed on, and be satisfied by, the bread of life. Then, and only then, can true transformation be possible.

I. From John to Jesus

A. Our text opens some weeks after the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist, in which we saw Jesus identify with sinful humanity by going into the water of the River Jordan and submitting to our baptism. We then heard the voice from heaven as Jesus came up out of the water, “This is my Son whom I love; with him am I well pleased.” We reflected on how this provides us with an outline of Jesus’ job description as both Messianic Son and Suffering Servant. Jesus is the King of kings who carries out his rule not with pride and means of a sword, but with humility and the means of a cross. Now, enough of a revival had broken out in the wilderness where John was preaching and baptizing that the religious authorities in Jerusalem sent some investigators to find out who this John fellow really was. “Nothing special,” was his reply. “I’ve just been appointed by God to prepare people for the coming of the Lord.”

B. The day after this exchange we find John hanging out with his followers, probably at their favorite oasis, when Jesus just sort of casually walks by. Since John doesn’t record the 40 days Jesus spent in the wilderness following his baptism, perhaps Jesus has just finished those days and is now making his way out of the wilderness and back into civilization. With Jesus back in circulation, John wants his followers to know that this is the one about whom he has been testifying, the one who is far greater than he (John), and maybe above all, that this is the one whom God has chosen to restore and re-create the world, the Lamb of God who has come to liberate the world from the effects of sin. I imagine that this gave those who heard him much to ponder that night. The next day, John is at it again: “Look, the Lamb of God!” he exclaims, as Jesus passes by. This time, two of John’s followers get up and begin to follow Jesus.

C. This, of course, is what John wants to happen. As John later says, when some of his disciples start to get a little petty and complain that Jesus is gathering more disciples than he, “He [Jesus] must

become greater; I must become less” (Jn. 3:30). So, John points Jesus out to Andrew and an unnamed disciple (probably John, the gospel writer). They fall into step with Jesus and after spending the better part of a day with him, Andrew decides he’d better get his brother, Peter, in on the action. The next day Jesus taps Philip on the shoulder who is then quickly moved to find his friend Nathanael to come and see what this Jesus is all about.

II. An Invitation and A Process

A. A couple of items I’d like to notice with you about these invitations and this process. First, this is the pattern of effective witness. What we see is one beggar telling another where to find bread. What we see here is not a large evangelism program that John has begun, but the fact that most people (over 75% the statistics say) get to know Jesus through someone else’s story, through someone else’s experience. We don’t need to be able to explain everything or even have everything figured out. We simply tell of our experience and invite our friend or neighbor or co-worker to “come and see,” to explore this Jesus for him or herself.

This is what John the gospel writer was doing. At the end of his great work he puts it this way:

Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing, you may find life in his name (Jn. 20:30f).

John has found the life that is truly life in Jesus, and he wants to share that life with others, so he invites us to “come and see” as we read. He shares a similar sentiment at the beginning of the first of his three letters. Talking about Jesus he says (1 Jn. 1:1-4):

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. . . We write this to make our joy complete. [“Your joy will double our joy.” *The Message*]

When we’ve experienced goodness, when we’ve seen glory, when beauty has been revealed to us, we just cannot keep it to ourselves. Nor, when you think about it, is it fair that we do so! Have you ever experienced the joy of Jesus, a joy that, like the beauty of a sunrise or sunset, sends you looking for others to come and share in what you are experiencing? I say this not to make you feel guilty if you haven’t, but to encourage you to pray, “Jesus, show me your glory! Jesus, help me experience your soul-satisfying joy, that I couldn’t help but want to share it with another.”

B. Second, this coming and seeing is a process, a lifetime of a journey. None of these fellows, not John the Baptist, not Andrew or Peter, not Nathanael or Philip, has a full orb ed understanding of who Jesus is yet. They think they’ve found the Messiah, but they each have a journey yet to discovering the suffering servant part of his call, and along with it, just how much he loves each of them. They would need to go through several steps of understanding, followed by a step or two of misunderstanding, followed by more understanding, etc. As Price put it a few weeks ago, it’s really more about the journey with Jesus than the destination. It’s as we follow him and abide with him that we begin to grow in our understanding of his great love for us.

If the journey with Jesus is a process, where would you say you are? What more of Jesus as the Messiah do you yearn to know? What could be the next step in this journey of coming and seeing?

III. A Question of Desire

A. This next step might just be facilitated by a seemingly simple question Jesus asks of those two disciples who have come from John. When Jesus turns around and sees them following, he asks: *What do you want?* It's a question each of us must answer. What are we looking for out of life? What do we desire? In one sense, it's a question we might be afraid of. Certainly, not all desires are good, and we just confessed a few minutes ago that we each follow too much the devices and desires of our own hearts. So, we can be afraid that our desire might get out of control or lead us down wrong paths. We also fear, I think, that we might desire things we can't have and so have to live with the pain of unfulfilled desire. And yet, we were made with, and to, desire.

B. Desire lies at the heart of what it means to be human and at the heart of what it means to be a follower of Jesus. As James K.A. Smith observes in his book, *You Are What You Love*, Jesus doesn't ask Andrew and John, "What do you know?" or even "What do you believe?" but "What do you want?" Could following Jesus be more about hungering and thirsting than about knowing and believing? Smith, a professor of philosophy at Calvin College (so he's no intellectual slouch), suggests that Jesus isn't content to simply deposit new ideas into our minds; he is after nothing less than our wants, our loves, our longings. Why? Because he knows that it is our wants and our loves and our longings that direct our actions. He knows it's not a question of *if* we will love something we believe is satisfying and ultimate, but *what* we will love that we deem satisfying and ultimate (pp. 1-10).

A wonderful Catholic theologian, Ronald Rolheiser, chimes in here in his book on desire, called *The Holy Longing*, when he observes that it is desire that makes us act, in a way that either leads to a greater integration, or a greater disintegration, of our relationship with God, self, neighbor, and the world (p. 7).

C. Therefore, instead of running from our desire, or trying to ignore it, bury it, or minimize it, we need to get in touch with it, name it, and bring it to God in prayer. As Rolheiser puts it, if you are feeling angry, pray that anger. If you are feeling sexually preoccupied, pray that preoccupation. If you are feeling murderous, pray that murder. If you are feeling selfish, pray that selfishness. Don't try to tell God what we think he wants to hear; tell God what is really going on in our lives and give him an opportunity to respond (*Prayer: Our Deepest Longing*, pp. 6-7).

St. Augustine, a fifth-century theologian, philosopher, and bishop from North Africa, pinpoints the issue. In his spiritual autobiography, *Confessions*, he writes of God: "You have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you." We have been made to have desires, and we will continue to be restless, feeling lost and unfulfilled, until our desires are directed away from the many fast-food substitutes that vie for our longings, and rightly order those longings toward God. So, says Jesus, name your desires and step in with me. As you walk with me and abide in me, I will feed you with living bread. I will love you and help direct your desires toward a healthy, God-pleasing, and God- glorifying end. "Look, the Lamb of God," says John. "Come and see," says the lamb.