

“On the Journey with Jesus”

Introduction: A couple of weeks ago we noted that Jesus’ public ministry began as he stepped out of thirty years of relative obscurity, and into the water of the River Jordan where he was baptized by John, empowered by the Spirit, and affirmed by the Father. Last week we saw he was then led by the Spirit into the wilderness for what turned out to be a time of testing. Would he fail, like Israel and Adam before him, choosing to serve himself? Or would he choose to serve us, walking the path of sacrifice, the path that led to the cross? Fortunately for us, he passed, which, we observed, helps us both in the future as well as the present, as we seek to stay on that path of service and hold firmly to the faith we profess (Heb. 4:14-16).

We pick up the action this week in John’s gospel. Jesus has recently returned from his 40 days in the wilderness. As he comes back into view, Jesus begins to attract the attention of a number of different fellows as the news about him begins to spread. As we hear the text, it will seem like people are hopping and bopping all over the place, but listen for the two invitations dominate the text. “Come and see,” is one. “What do you want?” is the other. Both are helpful to us as we think about the journey of following Jesus and how he forms and shapes us along the way.

I. “Come and See”

A. When we considered the baptism of Jesus by John, we thought a bit about how puzzled John must have been when he looked up and saw Jesus standing in the water before him, awaiting baptism. I also have to think that John was equally puzzled when Jesus disappeared, somewhere into the wilderness beyond where John was baptizing. Whether he saw Jesus wander off we can’t be sure. But, at some point, he must’ve wondered where Jesus had gone and even more, when he’d be coming back. John, after all, was preparing the way for this fellow’s ministry. When would it begin? So, my hunch is that John was kind of keeping an eye out for the day that Jesus returned, and when he did, John almost couldn’t contain himself. This is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, John proclaimed when he saw Jesus coming toward him. “Look” he cried out to whoever was in the vicinity. “This is the one God promised he would send to renew and restore both us and the world. I saw something like a dove descend to reveal that this is God’s anointed Son. Don’t miss this guy!!”

B. As far as we can tell, there was no immediate response on that day. But the next day we read that it happened again. Jesus walked by and John said “Look, the Lamb of God!” One of the things I appreciate here is John’s persistence. John was there “again.” John wasn’t going to give up. He kept showing up and he kept on directing whoever would listen, even those who had begun to follow him, to look instead at Jesus. We find this invitation to “look” several more times as the story unfolds. It occurs directly in the words “come and see,” uttered by both Jesus and Philip, and we can see it if we look closely as people begin to describe their experience of Jesus to family and friends.

C. There is an old saying that sharing our faith is just one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread. But that actually is the pattern of the most effective witness. The statistics reveal that most people, well over 75%, come to know about Jesus through someone else’s story. We don’t need to be able to explain everything about Jesus, or even have everything all figured out. We don’t need to have taken a seminary course or be able to expound the Apostle’s Creed. The best witness is to simply share

our experience and invite our friend or neighbor or classmate or co-worker to “come and see,” to explore this Jesus for themselves.

D. It’s actually what John the gospel writer was doing. What motivated him to write? He’d seen glory, and wants others to see what he saw. He puts it this way in his introduction: “The Word [Jesus] became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (Jn. 1:14). What is this glory? It’s the beauty, and goodness, and greatness, and magnificence of God that John saw and experienced in the person of Jesus. In the introduction to his first letter, John comes at this again. Speaking of Jesus, he writes (note all the references to “see”):

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. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete. [1 John 1:1-4]

John has written his gospel, and his three letters, because he desperately wants us to see what he saw, to know the Messiah he had come to know (cf. Jn. 20:30f), to rest in the life and the love of God that he’d found, to share in the joy that he has. It’s a joy that will not be complete until he shares it.

E. We know that kind of joy. I’ll be sitting in the living room watching a football game and Rama will be puttering in the kitchen. I’ll see a terrific play and just have to call out, “Rama, come here...you’ve gotta see this catch!” Or someone will come up to me and say, “Have you read this book? Seen this movie? Heard this band? You really must!” Joy almost cries out to be shared.

Sometimes, I wonder, when we find ourselves hesitant to speak about the things of our faith, if we might just need to pray, “Jesus, show me your glory, fill me with your soul-satisfying joy, a joy that is so great, a joy that is more infectious than a virus, that I can’t help but share it.”

II. “What do you want?”

A. “Come and see;” that’s the first invitation we hear as the journey with Jesus begins for these fellows. It’s both an invitation we can offer, and one we can receive. The second follows from it. When two of John’s disciples take him up on the offer to follow Jesus, and Jesus notices them there behind him, he turns around and says, “What do you want?” He doesn’t ask in an aggravated way, like, “please go away, you are bothering me,” but in a way that invites them to begin to get in touch with their desire, and to share that desire with him. It may not seem so at first blush, but “What do you want?” just might be the most important question Jesus can ask us. It’s important because desire really fuels and shapes our life. Desire reveals our loves and our longings, and our loves and our longings direct our actions.

B. James K. A. Smith, in his book on desire, “You Are What You Love,” observes that to be human is to be on a quest, to be on the journey toward some vision of what we consider the good life to be. On this journey we are oriented and directed by our longings, by our desires. We are learners, to be sure (and Smith is a professor of philosophy, so he certainly values the mind!), but we are more than that; we are also, Smith offers, lovers, people fueled by love. Discerning what this fuel of love is all about is a process, a lifetime of a journey. Desire is actually a gift from God who has placed a kind of restlessness

within us until we, as Augustine once observed, find our rest in God. What Jesus is inviting these two fellows (John's disciples) to do is to get in touch with their restlessness, with what it is that drives them. What is it that they are looking for out of life? Where is it that they are looking for love?

C. Do you know what your desires are, what you truly want? You might be hesitant to begin naming your desires, for several reasons. You might be thinking that having Jesus ask us what we want gets things the wrong way around. After all, shouldn't we be asking Jesus what he wants us to do for him? Well, that is a good question for us to ask, but it needs to come later in the conversation. Or, you might be hesitant to name your desires because what if they don't come to fruition? You'd then have to live with the pain of unfulfilled desire. Better to ignore them. Or, you're hesitant to name them because not all desires are good and can lead us down wrong paths. For instance, the desire to rob a bank, or covet your neighbor's spouse, or put an aggravating person to death, are certainly not healthy desires! But if we ignore our desires, and don't name them, for whatever reason, then they will pull and tug at us like a dangerous undertow, eventually sweeping us away with them.

Jesus knows that it's not a question of *if* we will love something we believe is satisfying and ultimate and will shape us and form us, but *what* we will love that we believe is satisfying and ultimate and will shape us and form us.

D. In their book, "The Cry of the Soul," authors Dan Allender and Tremper Longman write: "Ignoring our emotions [desire] is turning our back on reality. Listening to our emotions ushers us into reality. And reality is where we meet God." Jesus wants to meet us, through our desires, whatever they are. He wants to enter into a conversation with us that will help clarify and work through what is shaping and forming us. He wants to talk about what we desire and consider, as we journey along the way, what it is that God desires for us. None of the fellows we read about, not the Baptist, nor Andrew nor Philip nor Nathanael nor Peter nor even the writer of this gospel has a full orbed understanding of who Jesus is or where Jesus wants to take them. But they are willing to come and see what he's all about, to begin naming and processing their desires with him, and they can't help but want to invite others to share in what they're experiencing along the way. May we do the same as we journey on.