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ALL THAT WE ARE

John 1: 29-42

The story is told of a monastery in Germany that trained Christian brothers for various responsibilities within the Roman Catholic Church. One Christian Brother in training lived in mortal fear of being called upon to preach the sermon in the daily chapel exercised. As this young man thought about his apprehension, he decided to head it off by going to the monitor of the monastery and discussing the problem with him. In the course of the conversation he said, "Sir, I am willing to do any menial job that you assign me. I would be delighted to go out into the fields and plow, fertilize and irrigate them by hand to increase the productivity. If you would care for me to do so, I would be happy to get down on my hands and knees and scrub the floors here in the monastery. It would be a privilege for me to polish the silverware. Any menial job that you call upon me to do I shall be happy to do. However, please don't ask me to preach a sermon in chapel."

The monitor, looking at the young man and recognizing that an assignment to preach was exactly what he needed, replied, "Tomorrow you are to conduct the chapel and preach the sermon." The next day as this young brother stood behind the pulpit and looked out into the eyes of his peers who had assembled in the sanctuary, he was greatly apprehensive. He was so nervous he hardly knew what to do. He started his sermon by asking, "Brothers, Do you know what I am going to say?" They all shook their heads in the negative. He continued, "Neither do I. Let's stand for the Benediction. Pax Vobiscum"

Naturally, this infuriated the monitor. He said to the young man, "I am going to give you a second chance. Tomorrow you are to conduct the service in the Chapel, and this time I want you to preach a message."

The next day the scene was the same, and the young man began as he had the day before. "Brothers, do you know what I am going to say?" When they all nodded their heads in the affirmative, he said, "Since you already know, there is no point in my saying it. Let's stand for the Benediction. Pax Vobiscum."

The monitor was livid with anger. Once again he went to the young brother and literally roared at him. "I am tired of your chicanery! Tomorrow I am going to give you a third chance. IF you don't come through, I am going to put you in solitary confinement on bread and water!"

The third day, the scene was the same. The brother began as he had the two previous days. "Brothers, do you know what I am going to say?" Some nodded their

heads in the affirmative. Some shook their heads in the negative. He then said, "Let those who know tell those who don't. Let's stand for the Benediction. Pax Vobiscum."

Our lesson for the day from John is all about witnessing—sharing the Gospel message by those who know with those who don't! This morning's passage takes place the day after the Baptism of Jesus. Today's message is very different from the Biblical Word for January 12th: in the opening verses of that lesson, John the Baptist admits he didn't know the real identity of Jesus: "I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel."

But John the Baptist clearly does know who Jesus is in our passage for the day. He calls him "The Lamb of God," as John is waiting with two of his disciples. These followers of John the Baptist then leave his side and go to be with Jesus. And we read that when Jesus sees them following him, he asks them a question, "What are you looking for?"

If John was clueless about what is going on earlier, then the disciples are even more at a loss. Here is Jesus asking a momentous, life-changing question, and the only thing the two disciples can say is, "Rabbi, where are you staying?" (Huey). But Jesus does not dismiss the two men but instead invites them to see the place where he is staying. And he does it once again with profound words, "Come and See." It seems to be a variation on the familiar words of Jesus that we read in the other gospels, "Follow Me."

What these words say to me is watch and see what I do; learn from my example. The words also communicate a great deal about the power of evangelism, about witnessing and drawing others to Christ.

Let me share two stories I have always loved. The first is that after years of service in Africa, the famous missionary Robert Moffat returned to Scotland to recruit helpers. When he arrived at a church on cold wintry night, he was dismayed that only a small group had come out to hear him. What bothered Moffat even more was that the only people in attendance were women. In that day and time, only men were regarded as serious candidates to be missionaries. And so while Robert Moffat was grateful for the interest of the ladies, he was there primarily to recruit men and had chosen as his text, Proverbs 8:4, "Unto you, O men I call." In his discouragement, Moffat almost failed to notice a small boy in the loft who was pumping the bellows of the organ.

While no one volunteered that evening, the young boy assisting the organist was moved by the challenge. Right then and there the child promised God that he would follow in the footsteps of the Pioneer Missionary. The boy made good on his vow. HE applied himself in school and obtained a degree in medicine. Ultimately the young Scot in the organ loft grew up to become a missionary doctor who ministered to countless tribes on the African Continent. His name was David Livingstone!

That is the first story of "Follow Me." The second is this: When H.M. Stanley went to Africa in 1871 to find a report on Dr. Livingstone, he spent several months in the Missionary's company. It was indeed Stanley's time to "Come and See," to carefully observe the man and his work. We are told that during their time together, Livingstone

never spoke to Stanley about spiritual matters, but Dr. Livingston's loving and patient compassion for the African people was beyond Stanley's comprehension. He could not understand it. Livingstone literally spent himself in untiring service for those whom he had no reason to love except for Christ's sake. Stanley wrote in his journal, "When I saw that unwearied patience, that unflagging zeal, and those enlightened sons of Africa, I became a Christian at his side, though he never spoke to me one word." "Come and See" and "Follow Me," says Jesus to the disciples. Today we say, "Walk the Talk". Learn by example.

At the end of today's lesson there is the story of Andrew, the one who is sometimes called the First Missionary. John tells us that he is one of the two disciples who leave John the Baptist to follow Jesus. And so we read that he goes to find his brother, Simon. When he does, Andrew excitedly tells him, "We have found The Messiah," The Anointed One; and he then brings Simon to Jesus: "Come and See".

There is great power in hearing a testimony. That which comes to use by word of mouth. Andrew and the other disciples were looking for the Messiah, The Perfect Spiritual Leader. Well, for many years I looked for the perfect pen. I tried an assortment of cartridge pens, fountain pens and ball point pens. But there was something about each one that I didn't quite like and then one day in 1994, I used a Pentel Rolling Writer for the first time – an inexpensive pen that had all of the qualities that I had been searching for. It was the Messiah of pens! I was hooked and have used Pentel Pens to this day.

Once imported from Japan, The Pentel Pen was introduced into this country without heavy promotion. And yet sales in the first year rose to an astonishing 1.8 million dollars. The Pentel officials explain it by Word-of-mouth advertising. People in business and public relations, office workers and homemakers did the job for the Pentel Company simply by using it and introducing it to others: "Come and See."

So Andres shares the news of his discovery with his brother, and the face of the church is changed forever. The last verse of our lesson tells us that when Simon meets Jesus, the Messiah tells him, "You are Simon, Son of John. You are to be called Cephas (which is translated Peter)."

This passage should cause each of us to think deeply about how we share our faith. Do we invite others to "Come and See"? Do we extend the right hand of Christian fellowship? Do we encourage our family and friends to come to a service at Hammond Street Church? 80% of all people who attend a worship service do so because of the invitation from someone they know. If you give that person a ride to church, the percentage goes even higher. That winsome invitation moves people to say to themselves, "Gosh, if they are willing to invite me to come to church and even take me, that congregation must mean a lot to them. I guess I'll have to check it out!" Word-of-Mouth advertising.

Several years ago when I was going through some papers, I came across a theme that my son, Justin, wrote in 1995.

After his junior year in high school, Justin went as part of a team of 27 youth and adults from the church I then served to Via Neely, Costa Rica.

The assignment was to clear trees and brush behind a church and to build an eight foot cement wall. The group was also recruited to teach vacation bible school to the children throughout the week. Justin reported there was great apprehension and pessimism about taking on this project, as virtually none of them had any building experience. But the group decided that the people of the town were counting on them, so they needed to follow through. It wasn't long before the youth and adults were waking up at 6 A.M. each day, eating a good breakfast and then heading off to the work site. As the news spread about their project, a few local people joined them. While there was a communication barrier between the Americans and the Costa Ricans, Justin was impressed at how well they began working together.

When the group did all they could building the wall, they learned they had been invited back the next summer to build a parsonage for a pastor whose home had been condemned. The church youth director, Kevin Mayne, gathered the group together and asked them to join in prayer. He says, "I remember praying, 'Lord, we feel called to come back next year and build this parsonage so that the church can continue.'" And then Kevin took it a step further and asked God to give them a sign.

A day later, the group headed out for the village of Tamarindo to lead the Vacation Bible School. The Pastor, a man named Raul, had told them there would be about 15 children or so. I'll let Kevin pick up the story:

We arrived that morning and already there were children inside the church. The VBS crew began telling stories and singing songs to a group of fifteen children when all of a sudden our attention was turned to the pathway leading up to the church. Down that winding road was a continuous stream of children dressed in their school uniforms. It was a sight we shall never forget. There were 100 kids! I remember Kip Putnam (one of the youth) putting his arm around me and saying, "Do you think this a big enough sign?" I believe that was one of the most powerful moments of our lives. We later learned the principal of the school was a Protestant, and she dismissed classes so that they could hear the Good News of Jesus Christ.

For Kevin, for Justin, for Kip and for the 27 souls from South Texas, it was a mountain top experience. Kevin Mayne says something I have discovered in my own life: "I am a believer in mission and service. It changes lives. It allows you to put into action all the things you have learned in church." In his journal. Kip Putnam made this entry for June 29th: "On Sunday, we prayed for a sign. I believe that prayer was answered today. I believe I have found my place in this world."

Last Sunday afternoon when we organized our New Youth Group, I spoke about doing mission projects. And I related how a year after Justin went to Costa Rica, I talked with him about getting a summer job. Justin too had found his place in God's world. He said, "Dad, There is no way I would ever dream of not going back to Costa Rica. I could build a house by myself if I had to. I feel that I have made a commitment to the people there, and I need to go back and finish the project."

Jesus offered a very simple invitation to that group of Rag-Tag fishermen when he began his public ministry. "Follow Me", he said to them. It was the chance to make a life-changing commitment. He also gives us the same word: Experience the Christian Life in all its fullness. Find your place in this world. All that you are. Try it, said Jesus. Come and See!

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