

# Come and See! And Stay!

## John 1:36-39

*When [John] saw Jesus passing by, he said, "Look the Lamb of God!", When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked "What are you looking for?" They said, "Rabbi" (which means Teacher), where are you staying?" "Come", Jesus replied, "and you will see."*

### 1. Christmas Morning – “Come and See”

“Come and See.” I can vividly remember saying those words, to my little sister, way before dawn on many Christmas mornings.

“Come and see!”

Sometime during the night, after we had returned home from the Christmas eve service, and had gone to bed, wonderful packages would appear under the Christmas tree.

Our family had a Christmas morning tradition of opening Christmas gifts. I would be up first, at some abominable hour — but the family tradition was to wait and to open presents together. So, before Dad and Mum would stumble out of bed, my little sister and I would creep down to the tree and sit and gaze in wonderous expectation at the presents. We would stay there for a while, poking and prodding and investigating, trying to work out what mysterious gift was hidden under the wrapping paper.

This quiet contemplative time never lasted long. The excitement would build and we would then dash off to our parents bed room. And together we'd excitedly wake them up with the invitation to 'come and see!'

I can still remember the distinct 'rhythm' of those early Christmas mornings. First the excited invitation: 'come and see', then the quiet waiting by the tree, contemplating, then the issuing of the invitation once again – this time together – to our parents – 'come and see'.

That same rhythm or pattern is present in our gospel text today.

### 2. John's preaching: “Come and See!”

The first part of today's reading from St John is all about 'coming and seeing'.

John the Baptist has had a very public and high-profile ministry. This noisy and abrasive man with his weird clothes and strange diet has been ministering beside the Jordan river; standing there in the wilderness – and basically shouting out: 'Come and see!'

Come and see – what?

In essence, two things:

- First of all, John has been calling attention to the human condition.
- And he's been calling a spade a spade.

John diagnoses the problems of the world by drawing attention to the problem with our human hearts. The problem is not 'out there'; the problem is 'in here' (in the human heart). John cuts through all kinds of hypocrisy – as he highlights our need to turn back to God. To realign our lives with God's purposes – to actually allow God to be God. In this regard, John stands in the tradition of the prophets before him, "This is what the LORD says: turn back to me!" John's call is the call to repentance.

But, more importantly, and most essentially, John has been sent to point us to the solution to the human condition! The solution is not 'in here' (in our human hearts) but the solution is 'out there'.

Where? Wherever Jesus is. (Staying) Come and see the promised one of God!

Listen again to some of the ways John says: 'come and see'.

- "Look the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (29)
- "This is the one..." (etc... 30)
- "The reason I came... is that he might be revealed!"
- 'I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God!'

John was aware that Jesus was no ordinary man, but rather, the one who 'has surpassed me, because he was before me'. (30) John is speaking, as all the prophets did, because of a direct revelation from God. 'I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptise with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptise with the Holy Spirit.' John stands in the tradition of the prophets who proclaimed also the saving power of God and the promise of God's Messiah who would deal, once and for all, with the problem of the human condition – who would deal with sin.

All of that preaching, all of that testimony, in fact an entire life's work is behind the opening phrase in our Gospel reading today: "Look the Lamb of God!"

Wow! Faithful John! The lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! John's invitation to 'come and see' was imbued with a Holy passion, it was an inspired invitation to come and see – and receive the gift long promised by God. Every gift deposited under every Christmas tree, whether the participants are conscious of it or not, is an echo of God's invitation through John.

But remember the second part of my Christmas morning pattern? Remember how we 'stayed' by the tree for a time, contemplating the gift? Part two of our reading today is about 'staying' – with Jesus.

### **3. Jesus Gracious Invitation - Come and See... and Stay.**

What happens after John's disciples hear the invitation? Well, John's disciples do 'get it'. We're told that when they heard John, they followed Jesus. Jesus speaks to them (for the first time in this gospel). He asks them:

'What are you looking for?'

'Rabbi, teacher, where are you staying?' they reply.

"Come," Jesus says, "and you will see."

So they went and saw where he was staying and they stayed with him that day.

Did you hear how many times the word 'stay' is used? The story of discipleship, could be expressed as 'coming and seeing...' and 'staying... with' Jesus.

Have you ever had a really gifted teacher who was passionately trying to get you to understand something incredibly wonderful and powerful and meaningful and potentially life-changing... and they knew that you were finding it difficult, but in their passion they really wanted you to be able to 'get it' - and so they would suddenly say to you excitedly:

'Stay with me on this! Stay with me!'

To be a disciple of Jesus is to be a life long learner, to 'stay with' Jesus for the rest of our lives. The disciples do stay with Jesus – for a day, and indeed for the next three years as he conducts his public ministry.

They won't stay with him as he goes to the cross.

But after the resurrection, by the power of the Holy Spirit he will forgive them, restore them, and send them out – and he will sustain them by staying with them for the rest of their lives. Most of them will give their lives because of what they have received as a result of 'staying with' Jesus.

But, most stunningly of all – they will revolutionise the entire earth by issuing the invitation to others: "Come and see! Come and see – and stay with Jesus!" This is the 'rhythm' of discipleship – and of evangelism – come and see... stay... and then the invitation is repeated: come and see.

#### **4. Stay = Remain = Abide**

Now, I want you to 'stay with me' as I unpack the little word 'stay' that is used in John's gospel so significantly. The word 'stay' here or 'remain' in some translations, is an incredibly important key word in John's gospel.

Remember the old Hymn: *Abide with Me?*

Abide with me; fast falls the eventide:  
The darkness deepens; Lord with me abide:  
When other helpers fail, and comforts flee,  
Help of the helpless, O abide with me.

The word 'abide' and the word 'remain' or 'stay' are all translations of the same underlying Greek word. When Jesus speaks about 'staying with him' he is not speaking about something momentary or fleeting or superficial. He's not talking about something that is transitory or temporary. He's talking about a deep – and abiding – relationship.

Similarly, the invitation to come and see Jesus is not about a 'seeing' that is just a quick glimpse, but it's a 'seeing' that will draw us deeper and deeper into the life that we have in Jesus.

So, how do we 'stay' with Jesus in this deeply abiding sense? How do we enter into this relationship?

John uses the word 'stay' (or 'remain' or 'abide', you'll see both of those in English versions) most profoundly in three other places in his gospel.

In John 8:31 Jesus says:

"If you abide/remain/stay in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

He is present with us, he stays with us through his Word.

In John 6:56:

“Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides/remains/stays in me, and I in him.”

He is present with us, stays with us through the Holy Supper.

And Jesus underscores the deep and intimate, and life giving nature of this ‘staying’ in John chapter 15 (4 and 5):

“Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; and you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”

## **5. How Jesus ‘stays with’ us in our daily lives.**

So what does all this look like in a practical sense? We ‘stay with’, we ‘abide with’ Jesus in a multitude of ways.

### **Hearing the preaching of the Word.**

What John the Baptist did continues in church each and every Sunday. Pastors are called, set aside for this particular calling or office. And they have the privilege and responsibility of doing it every week.

It is not an easy job week after week Sunday after Sunday. Pastors need your prayers as they undertake this task.

Jesus ‘stays with us’ through his Word on a daily basis. As we take a key thought away with us from the sermon for the week. As we spend time in His word each day. And there are a multitude of ways to do this!

### **Daily devotions.**

Listening to our pastors sermon from the St Paul’s web site if we missed it!

Listening to podcasts that are faithful to God’s word.

Recently my wife and I have started listening to a wonderful new resource: The English Actor and Christian, David Suchet has recorded the NIV Bible and we’re listening to a chapter or two each morning.

God is present as we build each other up through Christian conversation and encouragement too.

Our Lutheran confessions have a wonderful description of this: they speak of the mutual consolation and conversation of the saints as a means of grace. One of the ways God ‘stays with us’.

### **Receiving the Lord’s Supper**

In our public worship today we will ‘stay with’ Jesus, or rather, he will ‘stay with’ us, as we eat the bread and drink the wine, his body and blood, in the Supper he has given to us. As we come to the altar, we abide together with him in an utterly profound and mysterious way.

These are the key ways Jesus allows us to “stay” in him; these are ways he grafts us into his central life-giving self. The gospel, in a nutshell, is about what Jesus does, and is doing, continuously to keep us connected to himself. Jesus came and saw the need of the world for forgiveness – and he stayed! His presence remains. In the ways that he has ordained.

## **6. 'What are you looking for?'**

The natural outflow of an abiding relationship with Jesus is the desire and privilege of inviting others. All this 'staying' with him has a side effect! As we stay with him we are enabled to say: "Come and see!"

But before we issue that invitation, I would suggest another practical hint for personal, relational evangelism.

I would like to suggest that the question that Jesus opens this gospel with: 'What are you looking for?' is one of the most gracious and tender and loving questions that we can ever ask our friends, or our family or our loved ones, or perhaps the person sitting next to us on the plane or at a bus stop... it's the 'pre-evangelistic question'. It's the question that actually comes before 'come and see'.

Let me explain!

'What are you looking for?' What do we human beings really need to live the abundant life that Jesus promised. Remember his words: I have come that you might have life and have it abundantly?

First and most obvious answer is that we don't need stuff. That's the answer that our consumerist culture encourages us to have. Material possessions will make you happy. Or money. We know plenty of examples that contradict this assertion.

The second answer our culture pushes at us:

Status, fame, 'likes', affirmation. These are what you need. These are what you are looking for. We're fond of using the phrase: "Come and see" – 'Come and see' how many 'likes' I got on Facebook, come and see how many people are following me on 'Instagram' (!) But deep down these things won't satisfy. They aren't what we need.

Many people crave the 'ideal' relationship. A relationship that won't let us down. A relationship in which we won't experience disappointment in some way. There's no one person, however, that can meet all our needs in this sense.

We are all looking for something far more deeper than we can ever know – until Jesus himself asks us the question and invites us to come and see where he is staying. To paraphrase St Augustine:

"O Lord, You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless, until they can find rest in you."

So, in our gospel reading teaches us today that Jesus' gracious and empowering invitation to 'stay with him' leads us into the life of discipleship and equips us to invite others to 'come and see'.

Jesus own question however, also teaches us a gracious way to serve our neighbours and friends: by listening first and gently finding the appropriate moment to explore the 'What are you looking for' question. This will take patience. We will have to 'stay with' our neighbour faithfully. We have the Holy Spirit's promise and power to help us find that right moment.

## **7. What are you looking for?**

As I close I would like to ask you today: "What are you looking for?" What are you really looking for? Maybe you're sitting here in the pew today and you don't even really know the answer to that question!

What are you looking for? Well, my invitation to you today, my joy-filled invitation to you (and I want you to hear it with all the excitement that my little sister heard my Christmas morning invitation to her all those years ago (!)) is this:

Come and see! Jesus has arrived – for you! He is God’s lamb who came to take away your sin – and to meet your deepest need! He’s saying to you today: ‘Stay with me! I love you and I gave my all for you, my life for you!’ Even if you’re unsure, ‘stay with him’.

His promise is ‘come, and you will see!’ And in staying with him you *will* find what you are looking for!

Amen.