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Title: Come and See

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Scripture: [John 1:29-34](#)

Text: [John 1:35-42](#)

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Have you ever gone to the theater only to get caught in traffic on the way and miss the first part of the play or the movie? And, then, as if being late wasn't bad enough, you start feeling sick after you arrive and have to leave before it's finished. That's what happening to you this morning. The first chapter of John can be thought of

as a four-act play and this morning we are only paying attention to the middle two acts. You've arrived late – no, it's not your fault. The sequence of events is already underway and we will finish church before the production ends. This does NOT give you permission to leave mid-sermon feigning some sudden illness. We'll be out on time.

Since we missed the first act, I'll just tell you that it's about John the Baptist. Or, as Randy said last week, it might be more appropriate to call him, "John, the washer guy" or "John, the dipper" or "John, the drowner." That sermon is online on the website in case you missed it.¹ The first 28 verses of the first chapter of John – what I've called Act 1 - are background information – information you need to understand the rest of the chapter. It's an introduction of "John the washer guy" and it tells us that John is not the light but that he testifies to the light that will come later. When the leaders of Jerusalem interrogate John regarding his identity in those early verses, he does not tell them who he is but, rather, who he is not.

He tells them that he is not the Messiah, nor is he Elijah, nor is he a prophet, likely referring to Moses. He tells them that he is baptizing with water but that this is only the beginning. It will get better because there is a character in the story that they haven't met yet. He must have been thinking, "If you've got issues with me, just wait until you meet Jesus." And, with that, the curtain closes on Act 1.

The middle two acts are where we'll spend our time today. The next day, the curtain rises on Act 2. Jesus appears and John makes a formal introduction,

"Here is the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" He goes on to recount the moment that he baptized Jesus. "I baptized him and the Holy Spirit came down and rested on him. That's the difference between him and me," he says. "I baptize with water, he baptizes with the Spirit. I have seen this first hand and I want you to see it as well."

Act 2 closes and Act 3 begins. The next day, John is standing with two of his disciples and, together, they were watching Jesus at a distance. John points out Jesus to the two and says, "Look, here is the Lamb of God." Seemingly, upon those words these two disciples resign their positions as followers of John and begin to follow Jesus.

Here's what's so interesting to me about what happens that day. As these two men follow behind Jesus, Jesus turns around and confronts the two. He says, "What are you looking for? What are you after? I see you following me, what are you hoping to find? What do you think I can do for you?" OK, we don't have record of him saying all those things but that was his line of questioning. Jesus' question, "What are you looking for?" strikes me as a bit odd. Wouldn't a more logical question be, "What do you want?" If I catch someone following me, that's my question. "What do you want from me?" But maybe this is our clue that this story isn't about what people want.

Imagine what it would have been like to have Jesus confront you with a question like that. "What are you looking for?" In fact, let's not rush past that question too quickly. Maybe we should ask the question of ourselves before we go any further. Since we're all here, having braved the weather to come to church, I think it's probably safe to assume that we are, to varying degrees, following after Jesus. Some are probably following Jesus more closely than others. Some are right behind him or even walking right up next to him. Others are following at a safe distance, not wanting to get too close. Perhaps you're heard some things about Jesus, but you're not entirely sure that it's all true. You've heard he can be trusted but you'd like to see for yourselves. Just let me watch for a while. Either way, most of us here are following after Jesus.

So what if Jesus stopped in his tracks this morning, turned around to face you, and asked you point blank, "What are you looking for? I see that you are following me. I know that you've been checking me out. What are you after? What do you think I can do for you? Where do you think I am leading you?"

What would you say? How would you respond? Do you think Jesus has the answers? Are you hoping Jesus will fix your life? Are you looking for security? Belonging? Peace? Forgiveness? Relief?

Are you just curious? What do you say to Jesus when he turns and asks you, "What is it that you are looking for?" It's a question to ponder because if we don't know what we seek, it's not likely that we'll find it.

Back to our third Act. What do the two men in the story say when Jesus asks his question? Well, they respond to Jesus' question with a question of their own. Jesus asks them, "What are you looking for?" and they answer him with, "Teacher, where are you staying?" Is that not a puzzling answer? "What are you looking for?" "Where are you staying?" First of all, "where are you staying?" is not an answer, it's another question – a question that, on first blush, is totally unrelated to the question that was asked. It would be like me asking what you had for breakfast and you asking me back if I thought the sidewalks would freeze this morning. Had I ever answered a question on a test with such an answer, it would have gotten its rightful share of red ink and likely an "F" scrawled at the top of the page.

But, it made it into the Gospel of John. And, Jesus doesn't chastise them for their inappropriate question so it must be important. John's Gospel is seen as the most theological of the four Gospels so maybe we should not write off the answer so quickly and look at it with those lenses. First, we need to know that the word for "staying" and for "remaining" in Greek is the same word—"meno."² "Meno" is used in this story five times in very quick succession. Twice John says the Spirit came to Jesus and remained or stayed. Then, the two disciples ask, "Where are you staying?" They go and see "where he was staying and they stayed with him that day." Remain. Remain. Stay. Stay. Stay. Stay. Another good word for "stay" is "abide." "Abide" conjures up in me a spiritual nature of staying someplace. Abide with me. Abiding is being intentional at being or staying!

How are you at intentionally "being?" What even does that mean? To me, "abiding" or "staying" as it's being used here is giving yourself the time to find a spiritual center without distraction. Most of you know that my mother passed away on December 22. I arrived in Kansas two days earlier at the encouragement of Randy and the rest of the staff, knowing full well that missing a busy Christmas Eve was a possibility but they said "go." The staff and the congregation have been so supportive and my family and I are so grateful.

Many people have expressed their sorrow that she passed so close to Christmas. I understand that sentiment because the season will now have that association for me but there was a blessing in the timing as well. She passed late on the 22nd, we made arrangements on the 23rd but because of the holiday on the 24th, 25th and even on the 26th, and we were forced to just "be." Offices were closed and we could not begin taking care of the

“business” of her passing. It was too early to sort through her things. We just had to “stay,” we had to “abide” with one another. We just had to be together as family and eat together and talk together. The time of “meno,” of “staying,” of “abiding” was a gift we hadn’t expected or would have taken if not forced to do so.

Jesus responds to their question about where he is staying with an invitation. “Come and see,” he says. Could this story be telling us something the disciples don't yet know themselves? What people are looking for is not information, not answers to questions such as “Who is Jesus?” or “Is this the one?” Or “Am I right about this piece church business?” What we are all looking for without even knowing it is a place to stay, a place to abide, a place to remain always. Jesus is that place, a person who is himself a home, a place to belong, and a whole way of life. Jesus knows that what the disciples really want is a place to belong. Whatever he sees on the faces of these two men following him leads him to make an invitation: “Come and see.” They do go with him. They end up staying, and his story becomes their way of life.

“What are you looking for?” says Jesus to people who were told by someone else where he could be found. “Come and see,” he said to people who wondered if they had a place in his story. The thing that moves people from one question to the other, from “What are you looking for?” to “Come and see” is the story the church has been called to tell. It's the only story the church has to tell, the story of its home, the place from which we draw hope and strength and power. That place is not a place at all but rather it's a person. That “place” is Jesus.³

“Where are you staying?” At first hearing it sounds like such a mundane, almost trivial question. Do we really want to know if he's staying at the Galilee Marriott or the B & B down the road? “Where are you staying?” In other words, where is your dwelling place? Where do you abide? Where do you belong? What are you really committed to? What are you really made of? All the questions that are hard to ask and answer of ourselves.

In 1898 a young man named Albert Schweitzer completed his undergraduate education at Kaiser William University in Strasburg. Over the next ten years he did a series of extraordinary things. He became a world-class organist. He published a book that transformed the historical study of Christianity, and is widely cited to this day. And he qualified as a medical doctor. This was a man who, it seemed, could do anything. But how was he going to turn all this talent and potential into a real life? How was he going to turn knowledge and experience into wisdom?

Where, in other words, was he staying? The answer was a little West African hospital on the Ogooué River at Lambaréné in Gabon. There, from 1913, he treated countless thousands of local patients, with conditions ranging from dysentery to sleeping sickness to leprosy to malaria to sandfly fever. He saw his work as an act of penance for the sins of European colonizers. He spent the majority of the 52 years from 1913 to his death in 1965 caring for and seeking to cure all who came to his hospital at Lambaréné. The irony was that he was probably a better theologian and musician than he was a doctor. But being a physician was where he “stayed.”

He turned his potential into actuality, he turned his knowledge and experience into wisdom, he let his life go beyond transformative moments into lasting commitment – he allowed Lambaréné to change him. When he was asked about what he had learned, Schweitzer said, “Everyone can have their own Lambaréné.” When we ask God, “Where are you staying?” God’s answer is, “I’m staying with you.”⁴

Schweitzer knew where he was staying. On this weekend of honor for Martin Luther King, a man of passion for justice, he knew where he was staying. The great men and women of faith through the ages and in our own time have two things in common. They knew Christ as their dwelling place and had taken him up on the invitation to abide with him. With that grounding, they were constant in issuing the invitation to others to “Come and See.” Come and see the difference dwelling in God can make in your life. Come and see the difference you can make in the lives of others when you abide with him. Come and see the transformation that can happen when you respond to and issue such an invitation. Come and see!

¹ Randy Spleth sermon, Crowded Waters, Geist Christian Church, January 7/8, 2017. www.geistchristian.org.

² Meno Greek information from www.biblestudytools.com in their Greek lexicon.

³ Idea of Jesus as a place from sermon, “What are You Looking For?” by Rev. Dr. Catherine Taylor, pastor of Blacksburg Presbyterian Church, Blacksburg, VA, January 20, 2008.

⁴ Albert Schweitzer story from a Baccalaureate sermon preached at the Duke University Chapel on May 13, 2011 by Rev. Dr. Sam Wells found at the chapel archives at www.duke.edu.