

Come and See!
A sermon preached at
Lendrum Mennonite Brethren Church\
Edmonton, AB
January 29, 2014
Text: John 1:35-42, Psalm 66:1-5

We're starting with a bible quiz! I don't want you to say the answer out loud; I just want you to think the answer. Can you recite the first verse of one of the gospels? You can tell me later which verse you thought of, but I am laying pretty heavy odds, that if you do know the first verse of one of the gospels, it's John's gospel; "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." That first chapter of John's gospel is so beautiful, so mysterious.

In fact John Calvin, the great Reformation thinker, remarked that the first chapter of John's gospel says more than our minds can take in. There are a lot of ideas in this first chapter, too many for our minds to take in, too many definitely for one sermon. But what I want to focus on today is how John emphasizes that we can SEE God.

Think of the words from this chapter; "And the word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth." In V. 14 John lays it out plainly. "No one has ever seen God." But he says it is the only Son...who has made him known. That's Jesus, the person the gospel is all about.

The scripture that was just read for us this morning is a few verses down from there, but still in chapter one. If you look at those first verses, the theme of seeing is right there too. Take your pencils...and underline the words that have to do with seeing.

The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, and as he **watched** Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, '**Look**, here is the Lamb of God!' The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. When Jesus turned and **saw** them following, he said to them, 'What are you **looking** for?' They said to him, 'Rabbi' (which translated means Teacher), 'where are you staying?' He said to them, '**Come and see.**' They came and **saw** where he was staying, and they remained with him that day.

The concept of seeing is a central theme in John's gospel...he uses a couple of different words for seeing, and he uses these "seeing" words more often than any writer in the New Testament. In these few verses alone, look how many times he uses the idea of seeing!

The gospel writer clearly says, "No one has ever seen God." And then still in the opening part of this story, he tells how Jesus is walking by. Jesus, the Son of God. Will anyone notice him? And we read that John the Baptist sees Jesus. Now there were a lot of people who might have seen Jesus...seen what colour hair he had, or how tall he was. But it was only John who really SEES him. John had a revelation from God that this Jesus was the Lamb of God. He saw with his eyes, but more importantly, he saw with his heart...he understood who Jesus was.

Often in the gospel, the use of the word "see" has this double meaning. It's the same in English. I see something, but then suddenly the penny drops and I SEE!!!! I suddenly comprehend a

deeper meaning to what my eyes had been viewing. I see and I SEE. And the writer of this gospel is playing with that double meaning.

So here is John. He watches Jesus, and says, “Here is the Lamb of God.” Two of John’s disciples hear him saying this and so they start following Jesus. Being a disciple means you believe in someone, it means you live with them, you travel with them, you stick with them through thick and thin. These two men have been with John the Baptist...but now, they suddenly are not following John, they are following Jesus. What shifted their allegiance? Certainly the clue we are given is that John has pointed out that this man is a Lamb of God, the Son of God, the long awaited hope of Israel. John’s words were enough for them to pack up and start following someone else.

Now Jesus sees the two men following him. He sees them...well he saw a lot of people, there were crowds of people Jesus saw. But Jesus SEES them ... he knows them as not casual passers-by but as people who are interested in him. And then he asks them a question, “What are you looking for?”

These are the first recorded words of Jesus in John’s gospel. The first words of “God made flesh”, the first words out of his mouth in this gospel are “What are you looking for?”

Now the two men formerly known as disciples of John were a bit taken aback by this question. You think they might say, “We are looking for the Lamb of God, the Son of God, the hope of Israel. Is that what you are?” And in fact later the next day, Andrew, one of these disciples, excitedly goes to his brother Peter and says, “We have found the Messiah.” You would think these two disciples might say, “We are looking for the Messiah!” But they do not say this to Jesus.

They aren’t ready to commit to an answer to Jesus’ direction question. The disciples respond to a question with a question, “Where are you staying?” So they throw the ball back in Jesus’ court. “Where are you staying?” It’s an engaging question, because it shows they want to be with him, they don’t just want a five minute Q & A with Jesus on the street...they want to spend time with him. They ask him, where he is staying or dwelling.

And this is where that observation by John Calvin is so appropriate, that the first chapter of John says more than our minds can take in. Because the disciples ask “Where are you staying?” which of course could mean, which house do you sleep in, which street is it on, are you in an upper room or back room?”

But John’s gospel has already spilled the beans to us. He has just told us, “The word became flesh and dwelt among us?” So when the disciples ask, “Where are you staying?” or “Where are you dwelling?”, you can imagine Jesus answering with a little smile on his face when he hears this question, because he knows the answer will blow these men away.

He doesn’t sit down and lay out the facts. He doesn’t give them a ten point summary of why he is the Messiah, or what it means to dwell with humans. He doesn’t in fact give them any answer. Instead he tells them to come and find the answer for themselves. He tells them, “Come and see.”

Their question? “Where are you dwelling?” Jesus’ answer, “Come and see.” They will see with their eyes where Jesus is sleeping, but by the very next day, Andrew will be filled with evangelical excitement, good news excitement. He runs to see his brother, “I have found the Messiah!” He has seen where Jesus is dwelling. Jesus, the Son of God is dwelling among us, among humans!

Andrew’s excitement will eventually deepen and mature. He thinks he sees who Jesus is, here on the second day after meeting him. But it is only three years later, as they have dwelt with Jesus, as they have seen Jesus in the garden and seen him on the cross and seen him laid in a tomb, that they realize the depth of what it meant for Jesus to dwell with human beings. Because we as humans live in the valley of the shadow of death, Jesus walked there too. Come and see. And of course the miracle at the end of the gospel is that glorious realization of the power of God over death. The disciples see the empty tomb, but it is only when they physically see Jesus’ body again, that they SEE the empty tomb and what that means for all of us, for all time.

What a chapter! I think it’s too bad that we mostly only read the first part of the chapter...we should all be memorizing this section too.

And so we hear Jesus’ question today, “What you are you looking for?” Now that I am here as your pastor, what are we looking for together? Are we looking for the same thing, or are we looking for different things? Because what we are looking for will determine what we see.

I while ago I watched a little video on line. It was a psychological experiment...there was a group of around eight people in a room, and they had a ball, and they were throwing the ball from one person to another. You were told at the beginning of the video to watch and count how many times the ball was thrown as these people moved around the room. Well, I watched the video and I counted the times the ball was thrown. And at the end of the video, the final question was, surprisingly, “Did you see the gorilla?” And I had just watched this video carefully and I didn’t see any gorilla! I would have noticed if there was a gorilla in this room of people playing ball! And then, of course, you play the video back, and you see that in fact, yes, a man in a gorilla suit entered the room, and walked slowly across it as all these people played with the ball. But I simply did not notice the gorilla in the room, because that was not what I was looking for, I was watching the ball.

That’s a pretty famous psychological experiment, you can look it up yourself, just google invisible gorilla. (Of course it won’t work for you because you all will be looking for the gorilla!) The principle of that experiment is that you will only see what you are paying attention to. Important things can happen, and you will just not notice them if you are not looking for them.

And so Jesus’ question, “What are you looking for?” is really important. It’s central. Because you will see what you are looking for.

What are you looking for? I had to ask myself that question when I came to candidate at this church. What am I looking for? Am I looking for a church that will pay me faithfully? Am I

looking for a church with a nice building? Am I looking for a church with friendly people? Am I looking for a church with good music? Check, check, check, check. All those things are here. And those are good things, nothing wrong with those things.

But let me tell you a story. After I graduated from all my schooling, I was called to a church in downtown Hamilton. And I will admit to you that truthfully I was not excited about that calling. It was not an important church; it was a tiny little church. They didn't have much money, it was a possibility that they would run out of money. It had a shabby building that was sort of grimy and falling apart. The people had gone through some hard things and there was a lot of conflict and anger in the church. And they were not good at music. They didn't have a pianist a lot of the time, and people didn't know the songs, and they couldn't sing very well and it sounded really bad a lot of the time. Maybe that all contributed to the fact that I was not that excited to be called to that church. But God made sure I wouldn't say no to that calling, because after I finished all my schooling I was unemployed for six months, and I really needed the money. I went there because I heard the call, and I wanted to be faithful, I just wasn't that excited about it. I guess Jesus was smiling and saying, "Come and See". But I was doubtful.

My experience there over the next eighteen months was riveting. It was not riveting because of the building or the friendliness of the people or the music. It was riveting because I saw the power of God working among us in a terribly broken situation. Together we went through crisis after crisis, and we went through it on our knees, and we prayed, and we needed God so badly, and God showed up. "Jesus stand among us, in your risen power, let this time of worship, be a hallowed hour." We saw that week after week, month after month. Holy ground, people's lives being changed by God, a community being shaped by faithfulness to God, a witness to God in a dark, broken, hard economically-depressed place.

That first ministry experience was a big wakeup call for me. What are you looking for? Well after that first church experience, and how it changed me, when I answer that question, I have to say that first and foremost, only and always, I am looking for Jesus. I am looking to find Jesus wherever I go. If I'm looking for other things, which may be fun things, or comforting things, or even important things that I really treasure, well, I might just miss the pearl of great price that is right under my nose. And I don't want to do that.

What about you? What are you looking for? I tell you, my brothers and sisters, that the only thing worth looking for is Jesus. You can get caught up in looking for a nicer building, or a more full building, or younger people in the building, or better music in the building, but if we spend our time looking for that, we might miss something essential. What are we looking for? The word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth. What we are looking for is Jesus. We are looking to see the power of God working in this community, through us in this city and this world. Jesus working in our hearts, changing our families today.

But what will that look like? Jesus stands there, saying, "Come and see."

And I don't know what that's going to look like. It would be great for me to be able to report to you that I turned that inner city church around. That it's a thriving bustling busy hub of activity with a great building and lots of people and really good music--it became a mega church! But

that's not what happened. What I can tell you is that a few years after I left, the church decided to close its doors. It had been wounded, and the church as an organization needed to end. But there was not a moment in that process where Jesus was absent. I know, I saw, I experienced that God was powerful and active in the lives of all those people before and after the closing of the church. And God continues working in that neighbourhood with all those people, but in different configurations, different organizations, different denominations. The kingdom of God turned out not to be dependent on the church that I was pastoring. We saw that the kingdom of God was dependent upon God, thank God, and not our own efforts.

That's just the thing. What are we looking for? So often we try to create something, engineer something that we can control. I want my life to be a certain way, I want a certain amount of security, I want a certain church, with certain amounts of friends and certain this and certain that. I want good health and safety for all I love. That's what I'm looking for, and I try my darnedest to make sure I can find that.

What I have found, though, is that it's when life falls apart, when all the pieces break apart, when I can't hold them together, when all we are looking for disintegrates, that there, precisely there, that's where Jesus is living. In the middle of the brokenness.

What I can assure you is that Jesus is here with us, in every experience of life, and that is what we must keep our eyes peeled to see. Jesus is present in ways that our minds cannot take in. To see Jesus...that's what we are praying for, that we will see Jesus in each other's faces, and in the faces of all the hurting people.

Jesus in the doctor's office where we get the bad news. Jesus with us when we get the middle of the night phone call saying there's been an accident. Jesus in the funeral home. Jesus at divorce court. Jesus at the closure of a congregation's doors for the last time. Jesus in Independence Square in Kiev, and the broken down neighbourhoods of Aleppo. Jesus in the tar sands, and at the truth and reconciliation commission, when unspeakable stories of cruelty are spoken. Jesus became flesh and dwelt among us.

What are we looking for? If we are looking for Jesus, we will always find him, because Jesus is always there. There is no power on earth or in the spiritual realms that can stop Jesus from dwelling with us, in every aspect of our lives together.

And so we end with a bible quiz. What are you looking for? We answer that as we take up the bread and the wine. We are looking for a Jesus who dwells among us, who enters into our lives, who takes over our lives, who dwells even in our own hearts. What will that look like at Lendrum? Come and see, that's the invitation my friends, Come and SEE!!!! That's the word of God, given to us this morning by Jesus, recorded in this gospel of good news, which is for all people. Amen

The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, 'Look, here is the Lamb of God!' The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, 'What are you looking for?' They said to him, 'Rabbi' (which translated means Teacher), 'where are you staying?' He said to them, 'Come and see.' They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon. One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his brother Simon and said to him, 'We have found the Messiah' (which is translated Anointed). He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, 'You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas' (which is translated Peter).

v29 The next day he saw Jesus coming towards him and declared, 'Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!'³⁰ This is he of whom I said, "After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me."³¹ I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel.'³² And John testified, 'I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a [dove](#), and it remained on him.'³³ I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, "He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit."³⁴ And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God.'

The First Disciples of Jesus

35 The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples,³⁶ and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, 'Look, here is the Lamb of God!'³⁷ The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus.³⁸ When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, 'What are you looking for?' They said to him, 'Rabbi' (which translated means Teacher), 'where are you staying?'³⁹ He said to them, 'Come and see.' They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon.⁴⁰ One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother.⁴¹ He first found his brother Simon and said to him, 'We have found the Messiah' (which is translated Anointed).⁴² He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, 'You are

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