

Epiphany 2  
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"Evangelism" - that word strikes terror in the hearts of Episcopalians. Even those of us who preached and are well schooled in the story of the church get nervous when confronted with the opportunity to share our faith story outside the pulpit. When asked all of us wonder, "What should I say?" We think to ourselves, "I don't want to say the wrong thing? I don't want to sound preachy or turn someone off."

No matter what you call it, the Gospel from John that we just read challenges us to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ, to be evangelists. Both John and Jesus invite others to join them. The invitation is as simple as "Come and see,"

John, the Gospel writer, does not begin his account of Jesus' life with a story about a child being born or even Jesus' baptism in the Jordan. John begins with what is known as a prologue: a description of who Jesus is followed by an account of John the Baptist on four consecutive days. On the first day, John responds to questions by the religious authorities making it clear that he is not the Messiah but the one who comes to "bear testimony to the light." On the second day, John sees Jesus coming and hails him as: "The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." John is saying Jesus is the one sent from God to bring about reconciliation.

John goes on to identify Jesus as "the one who ranks ahead of me because he was before me." He recounts how he saw the heavens open and the Spirit descending like a dove from heaven and remaining on Jesus. Thus John testifies with certainty, Jesus is the Son of God.

On the third day, John is standing with two of his disciples when he sees Jesus and again declares, "Look, here is the Lamb of God." John's disciples who heard this followed Jesus. It is interesting to me to note, the word John uses for "follow" denotes more than just going after someone, it implies a commitment to become a disciple.

The focus now shifts from John the Baptist to Jesus. John saw the Spirit descend on Jesus and he heard the voice identify Jesus as the Son of God, so he spoke, he bore witness. A witness tells what they have seen and heard.

Like John the Baptist and many others who have told the story, you and I are called to be witnesses in our own day. We are called to tell other people what we have seen and heard. Now, none of us here were present when the Spirit descended on Jesus and the voice declared him the beloved Son. But, we have seen the Spirit at work in our lives, we have heard the voice of God speak to us in many different ways. What we are called to do is be a witness to these experiences just as John shared his experience, what he saw and heard. To read and hear the story of Jesus is to be caught up in the cycle of listening, experiencing, telling and retelling.

Jesus' invitation to be a witness comes in a different way. Two of John's disciples heard him declare that Jesus is the Lamb of God. These two unnamed disciples go after Jesus. Jesus realizing he is being followed turns to them and asks, "What are you looking for?" If you think about this it is a strange question. "What do you want?" seems a more typical question. Perhaps John tells us this story to emphasize something more.

The disciples response to Jesus is as strange as his question, "where are you staying?" Jesus said to them, "Come and see."

They do and remain with him all day. Could this story be telling us something about the disciples that they did not know about themselves? The disciples were not looking for information. They did not want to know the simple answer to the question "Who is this Jesus identified by John as the Lamb of God." What they were looking for is a place to stay.

Perhaps we should be asking people who inquire of us about our faith, "what are you looking for?" What is it that you want out of life? Is it power, fame, wealth, a good time or do you want something to give your life meaning and feed your soul?

Jesus answer to that question was "Come and see." Come be part of my life and see where I am staying. Jesus did not try to persuade them of the existence of God. He did not preach a sermon about how they were to live their life. He did not talk to them to join a membership class or make a pledge. These are all good things but they would not have invited these two inquirers into Jesus' life. Jesus knew that what these two followers of John and those of us who follow today are looking for is a place to stay, a place to rest, a place to be. That place is a way of life. Jesus knows the disciples want a place to belong.

"Come and see." The disciples go with him. They end up staying and his story becomes their story.

I recall one summer day sitting on the front porch of my grandfather's home in the mountains of Virginia. A neighbor sought my grandfather out because he had been around the neighborhood for a long time. He wanted to know about the people who had owned the house he had bought just down the street. My grandfather started telling him stories about the people who had been part of that neighborhood. They began to compare family stories as the conversation rolled on. Finally the neighbor said, "Who are we and where do we come from, that's the real question isn't it?" My grandfather nodded, before he could reply the neighbor said, "Stories, that is all we have stories, stories define who we are don't they?"

"What are you looking for?" that is the question Jesus asked of two men who had been told by someone else where Jesus could be found. "Come and see" he says to people who wondered if there was any room in Jesus' story for them.

What happened that day was so profound that Andrew, one of the two who followed Jesus, sought out his brother and said, "We have found the Messiah." Immediately he took Simon to meet Jesus. Can we imagine ourselves acting as Andrew acted?

Perhaps all we can say to people who ask about our faith is, "Come and see." The thing that moves people is the story the church has been telling for over 2000 years. The story of Jesus is the place where we as followers can remain and find rest. It is for us the story of hope and strength and power.

The best way to tell the story is to invite others to come be part of the telling and retelling. Come be part of our lives, come and live into the story with us.

John Bell wrote a hymn entitled *Will You Come and Follow Me?* The hymn presumes freedom to make a choice and invites us to life changing possibilities if we choose to accept Jesus' invitation to "Come and see."

Will you come and follow me if I but call your name?  
Will you go where you don't know and never be the same?  
Will you let your my love be shown, will you let my name be known  
will you let my life be grown in you and the you in me.

