

Church of the Crossroads
Second Sunday after Epiphany
January 20, 2008
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“COME AND SEE”

Isaiah 49:1–7
John 1:29–42

Those who have belonged to this community of faith for awhile know that my appreciation of the Gospel of John has grown over the years. There was a time when I considered the Fourth Gospel to be of less importance when compared to the other gospels. Those were the days when I was caught up in the findings of The Jesus Seminar (by the way, what has ever become of The Jesus Seminar?). The motives of the Jesus Seminar were honorable. The Seminar wanted to restore an historical quality to the life of Jesus as a way to preserve his humanity. That needed to be done in light of the tendency of conventional Christianity to make Jesus into an otherworldly spiritual being. You will remember, however, that the Seminar’s search for the historical Jesus became focused on an assessment of the factual authenticity of the recorded sayings of Jesus. The Seminar scholars color-coded the sayings of Jesus in the four Gospels—*red* meant that Jesus surely said it; *pink* meant that there was a possibility that Jesus said it; *gray* meant that it sounded like Jesus; and *black* meant that Jesus surely did **not** say it. Well, the Gospel of John has no red sayings, no pink sayings, a couple of gray sayings, and the rest are black.

I eventually came to the conclusion that we should not dismiss the Gospel of John simply because it is not historically, factually true. Rather, it would be far better for us to view this fourth gospel as a profound literary rendition of the life of Jesus, written from the point-of-view of the Johannine community for whom it was written.

In John’s Gospel, the story of Jesus unfolds through a series of encounters he has with those who cross his path. The first of these encounters are included in this morning’s reading.

In today’s reading, forms of the verb “to see” and “to seek” are found throughout. John the Baptist “*saw* Jesus coming toward him and declared, ‘Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.’” (This

declaration, which became known as the *Agnus Dei*, has made its way into the words of the Mass, both spoken and sung.) Later, John testifies, “I *saw* the Spirit descend like a dove, and it remained on him.” Still later, John the Baptist says, “I myself *have seen* and have testified that this is the Son of God.”

“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 follow Jesus. Jesus turns towards them and asks “What are you *looking* for?” They say to him, “Rabbi, where are you staying?” He said to them, “Come and *see*.” Then, it is reported that “they came and *saw* where he was staying, and they remained with him that day.” Then, the Gospel writer, to add a touch of reality, says, “It was about four o’clock in the afternoon.”

This passage is, then, all about *seeing* and *seeking*. Some of the seeing is simply observation, but there is also a more profound seeing going on, born out of the act of seeking. John the Baptist sees Jesus, but on a deeper level this is the One whom he has sought. The disciples see where Jesus is staying—yes—but their seeing becomes far deeper than mere observation when they remain with Jesus the rest of the day.

The theme of seeking occurs throughout the Gospel. Later in the story, the disciples wonder what Jesus *seeks* with the woman of Samaria. Jesus is the one who *seeks* the glory of the one who sent him. “The Jewish religious leaders” are accused of *seeking* to kill Jesus, even before they become conscious of their own desire. In the garden on the night of his arrest Jesus demands of those sent to seize him, “Whom do you *seek*?” And in the garden, Jesus asks the distraught Mary Magdalene, “Whom do you *seek*?” Indeed, in John’s Gospel, “to seek” (*zēteō*) is a theologically freighted term. As Sandra Schneider says in her commentary on the Gospel, “the verb ‘to seek’ denotes the goal-determined dynamism of a person’s life. What one seeks reveals one’s deepest concerns.”¹

This week, those of us who travel along the H-1 freeway have experienced this kind of seeking. After the tragedy that occurred this last Thursday, when Cyrus Belt, a toddler, was thrown from an overpass into

¹ Sandra Schneider, *Written That You May Believe*. (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1999) 86.

oncoming traffic, the first time I traveled from home to church, I was intent upon *seeing* the overpass. I anticipated seeing the overpass, and when it came into view, I then looked the exact spot on the overpass, which is now marked by balloons, flowers, and stuffed toys.

I first *looked* for the place, but on subsequent trips along the same route, I found myself *seeking after* something far deeper. I sought the meaning of it all. And then the questions. The same questions arose a day earlier when we learned about the brutal murder of Janel Tupuola at the hands of a former boyfriend. Why did this have to happen? What is wrong with our world? Our social service agencies? Our courts? What is there about our human nature that would lead someone to do such a thing? Could it have been my child? My grandchild? I have a feeling I was not alone in my questioning. And now come all the answers—you only have to read yesterday’s newspaper. But the answers do not take away the deep anxiety and despair that such a needless tragedy creates within us. We cannot simply explain such a thing away.

My seeing and my seeking remind me of our story from the Gospel of John. In the story, the disciples first look for the place where Jesus is staying. Then their search becomes a seeking after the One who stays there. Their seeking becomes the beginning (I emphasize the word “beginning”) of a finding that will lead them on a journey towards meaning, which the Gospel describes as “believing.” And that is the journey that surely counts.

Yes, I believe that the search for meaning is the search that counts. In our society, the looking for answers, for solutions, for certitude, seems to take precedence. Do we have a question? Ask Google—you get the answer. Do we want a solution? Ask an expert. Do we want certainty in an uncertain world? Ask the TV preachers. They are the most certain people I know.

For us, though, the words of Rainer Maria Rilke have always held meaning. In *Letters to a Young Poet*, he wrote:

...I would like to beg you dear Sir, as well as I can, to have patience with everything unresolved in your heart and to try to love the questions themselves as if they were locked rooms or books written in a very foreign language. Don’t search for the answers, which could not be given to you now, because you would not be able to live them. And the point is to live

everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps then, someday far in the future, you will gradually, without even noticing it, live your way into the answer.

It is the search for meaning, with all its deep questioning, that is the important search from the perspective of faith. For faith has nothing to do with certitude. Faith has to do with trust, with trust in a God who wills wellbeing for humankind and for the earth, even though human beings continue to mess it all up.

This God dares to be a God who herself seeks to be with us and for us, in all the chance and change of life. This affirmation about God lies at the very center of our faith. It is such a very important affirmation in light of the tragedy of this past Thursday and the tragedy that occurred on the streets of Kailua just before that.

And so it is that the disciples sought after Jesus. Their looking became a seeking. The story does not tell us what they found, but this is just the beginning. The story will lead us to one encounter after another, to one revelation after another, and then to a cross. At the end of the story, we will be led to the one John the Baptist has already named “the Lamb of God.” We will be led to the servant spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, the servant who is “deeply despised, abhorred by the nations.” (Isa 49:7)

This is the Jesus, the Christ, whom we seek. This is the Jesus who can speak to our anxiety and our despair, for these he himself knows. This is the one who will wash the feet of the disciples, and bid us love one another. This is the one who will give his life for us, that we may come to know the suffering God, the Holy One who seeks after us, who comes to us, who is with us and for us.

“Come and see.” The invitation will be given again and again. The seeking will always be. The questions will always be, and also the doubts. The finding itself may be fleeting. But in the midst of our seeking, our questioning, and our search for meaning, we will follow the example of the one whom we seek—we will wash one another’s feet; we will love one another as we have been loved, we will serve the needs of our world, and in all of this, we will trust that God who seeks after us is with us and for us. Thanks be to God. Amen.