

SERMON: 19 January 2020 – Rev Alistair Cowper

“Come and see”

(Isaiah 49:1-7 and John 1:29-46)

John the Baptist says to the crowds coming for baptism, ‘reason I came baptising with water was that he (the Lamb of God) might be revealed to Israel’.

What strikes me about John’s statement is that the sole reason he was doing what he was doing was to reveal Christ.

It’d be nice to think that the sole reason we do what we do would be to reveal Christ.

Is that possible?

In our workplace? In our homes? In our community?

Doing what we do, to reveal Christ.

It must be possible, though clearly we often get it very wrong at times.

But the incarnation of God with us in Christ means that it must be possible for weak, sinful humans to reveal Christ. A goal we are to live towards every day.

What also strikes me about John’s testimony is that he’s really very honest about it. He admits he didn’t know Christ until he was revealed coming for baptism - ‘I myself did not know him’, he says, ‘but reason I came baptising with water was that he might be revealed’.

There is a sense that John kept doing what he felt called to do until he saw how his action helped reveal Christ.

Faith is like that. We often have to take the step before we see the glory.

Most of the time we just have to keep on keeping on before we see revelation.

But can we agree that what we want to see is Christ revealed?

I wonder what that looks like?

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John knew what to look for. God had told him, "The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is the one".

John knew then to look for the Holy Spirit. I wonder if he knew what the Spirit would look like? Maybe, but maybe not. But when he saw the dove descending, he had no doubt.

Likewise I think we usually know when we see or hear the Holy Spirit in or on someone's life.

There might be obvious outward signs - speaking in tongues, intense joy, tears, laughter, shaking, prophetic speaking, acts of healing - all of which we might have seen ourselves.

Or there might be inward changes take place that we often can't tell, like a deep feeling of the peace that surpasses understanding.

I'm not sure that we're always good at recognising the Holy Spirit at work or at affirming that work in other people. When was the last time we said to someone, it looks like the Holy Spirit is working in your life?

Maybe we could encourage one another more in that sort of way.

Maybe we could take a leaf out of the Psalmist's book when it says in Psalm 40:

I have not kept the good news of your justice hidden in my heart;
I have talked about your faithfulness and saving power.
I have told everyone in the great assembly
of your unfailing love and faithfulness.
Psalm 40:10

Maybe that word is not just to encourage one another but is also about sharing our faith whenever we have the opportunity.

Which takes us on to the second part of the reading from John and the words of invitation Jesus uses - Come and see; Come and be my disciple.

God, in Jesus, is inviting people to look and see and find.

But just before that, when John's two disciples start to follow Jesus, he asks them, in verse 38, an amazing question, 'what do you seek; what are you looking for?'

We might do well to meditate on that question to us. What is it we are seeking when we go after Jesus?

Debie Thomas [SLIDE] writes a blog called Journey with Jesus and she wrote this about this question:

When I go to church, when I pray, when I open the pages of Scripture, what am I looking for? Am I looking for *anything*, or am I just going through the motions of a religious life I inherited from my parents? Am I seeking consolation? Affirmation? Belonging? Certainty? Am I looking to gain power, or to surrender it? Do I want to know, or can I consent to trust? Am I looking to arrive, or to journey?

The disciples don't really answer Jesus question. They want to know more about him. Jesus doesn't tell them there and then. Instead he issues the invitation to come and see.

As Debie Thomas goes on to say,

“*Come and see.*” Which is to say: we have to follow Jesus all the way home if we want to know where he is and what he’s about. He won’t be pinned down. He won’t fit into any box we try to stick him in. He’s not the type who remains in stasis — he *moves*. At times, he will not be easy to seek or find. In short: the path that leads to him will become clear only when we decide to walk it.

She goes on The invitation to “come and see” is an invitation to leave our comfortable vantage points, and dare to believe that just maybe, we have been limited and wrong in our certainties about each other, about God, and about the world.

To “come and see” is to approach all of life with a grace-filled curiosity, to believe that we are holy mysteries to each other, worthy of further exploration. To come and see is to enter into the joy of being deeply seen and deeply known, and to have the very best that lies hidden within us called out and called forth.

What are you looking for? What are you looking for when you approach the people around you? Is your seeing fear-filled and narrow? Or is it spacious and brave? Are you looking to judge or looking to bless?

The thing is, only when we have *been seen* in the profoundly healing way of Jesus will we find ourselves able to see others as beloved of God. It is when we have been loved right down to the core of who we are that we find the capacity to embrace other people as Jesus embraced every disciple, every sinner, every doubter, and every believer who crossed his path.

May we look as he looks. May we want what he wants. And may we ever seek the One who always and everywhere seeks us.

And may we learn, like Philip, to echo the Jesus invitation to others to come and see for themselves, until Christ is all and in all.

Someone who has done that most of his life is Jack Deere.

[SLIDE] Like many of us, Jack Deere is a man who’s known darkness in life. He tells his story in the book *Even in our Darkness: A story of beauty in a broken life*.

Jack grew up with parents who never loved each other and whose mum vented her anger on the children. His dad shot himself when Jack was 12 and

thereafter Jack deliberately blocked out his feelings and coped with drink, drugs and violence, trying to live as wildly as possible. He stole things and carried a gun at all times for protection.

But then a friend heard the call of Jesus and became a Christian. Jack exiled him for that but the friend prayed every day for Jack for nearly 2 years until Jack heard Jesus invitation for himself.

On 18 December 1965 he was completely born again and everything changed. Jack studied theology, became a pastor and an Old Testament seminary professor.

But there was more darkness ahead.

His son became addicted to drugs and took his own life by shooting himself just as Jack's father had done years before. Jack's wife took to drink and drugs to try to cope and Jack found himself in the wilderness for years until he was able to hear the Voice of Love again, this time more gentle, more loving, more an invitation to see and enjoy God in all of life.

A key verse in Jack's transformation was John 10:28 about how God gives his followers eternal life and they are his forever. No one can snatch them away from God. To hear this spoke to his heart and helped heal the abandonment by his earthly father.

Meditating on the call to follow Jesus, he writes this:

[SLIDE] "The only Person who never needed any help chose twelve helpers. Why? For the pleasure it gave Him to love those twelve apostles and to teach them to love what He loved".

(Jack Deere, *Even in our Darkness*)

Jesus invites us to be friends for the sheer pleasure of loving us and to teach us to love what he, God, loves.

In our efforts to follow Jesus, may we turn to this Great Love, and return, again and again, to that Love, as the Ground of our being, the Source from whom all blessing flows; who strengthens us, heals us, and leads us on ... all for the sheer pleasure of love.

May we, learn more and more to live in the flow of this love of Christ; giving back the love we receive and passing it on in all our daily encounters.