

“Come”

I can be a stubborn and unreasonable person especially when it comes to of all things, clothes. Since my youngest days if I saw a shirt or pants or a suit that I liked I wanted that exact one. Not something similar, but that exact color, pattern, cut, and designer. It did not help that I am colorblind and often did not see the material the way others did. That stubbornness or lack of imagination whichever you think it is has not been limited to fashion.

Indeed, this week I read the passage from Revelation with a clear sense of who was being invited to “come.” Yet when I started reading commentaries on the passage I was flabbergasted that they all had a different understanding of who was being invited to come. I still have a hard time wrapping my head around it.

The scholars I was reading think that all of the invitations to come were asking Jesus to come. Early in this passage Jesus says “See, I am coming soon; my reward is with me, to repay according to everyone's work. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.” Therefore a few lines later when the Spirit and the bride say “come” and everyone who hears says “come” it makes sense that they are calling Jesus to come with his reward and to bring in the New Jerusalem and end to suffering.

But when I read that section I feel that we are being called to come. I've gotten it in my head and I just cannot get it out. I feel the Spirit and the bride whispering to us to come. I feel that “everyone who hears” is saying “come” to you and me. It seems quite clear that “everyone who is thirsty” is to come.

We are being beckoned to wash our robes, that is make our hearts and hands clean. We are to ready ourselves as if for a wedding to come to the one who is calling out to us to follow him, to follow his way of compassion and truth and love.

The world may be calling out in desperation for Jesus to come to us, to save us from the plagues of war, violence, pestilence, plague, famine, and the downright evil of some of our fellow humans. At this time many of us feel like we are living in a novel, the ones that they told us about in English class where the theme is man's inhumanity to man. Despite our calls Jesus does not come.

Wendell Berry in his book *Jayber Crow* makes is clear why Jesus does not come like a Marvel superhero. Berry wrote:

“Christ did not descend from the cross except into the grave. And why not otherwise? Wouldn't it have put fine comical expressions on the faces of the scribes and chief priests and the soldiers if at that moment He had come down in power and glory? Why didn't He do it? Why hasn't He done it at any one of a thousand good times between then and now?

I knew the answer. I knew it a long time before I could admit it, for all the suffering of the world is in it. He didn't, He hasn't, because from the moment He did, He would be the absolute tyrant of the world and we would be His slaves. Even those who hated Him and hated one another and hated their own souls would have to believe in Him then. From that moment the possibility that we might be bound to Him and He to us and us to one another by love forever would be ended.

And so, I thought, He must forebear to reveal His power and glory by presenting Himself as Himself, and must be present only in the ordinary miracle of the existence of His creatures. Those who wish to see Him must see Him in the poor, the hungry, the hurt, the wordless creatures, the groaning and travailing beautiful world.”¹

Christ cannot come as we wish because Christ does not want to enslave us. Neither does Christ want to take away the choice we have to learn to love something other than ourselves and our cravings.

Also, we have to recognize the paradox that Christ cannot come in power and glory because Christ is already here. Christ is here in the eyes of the poor, hungry, lonely, hurt, dying, and anguished. Christ is here in the faces of the nineteen children and their teachers who were murdered in Texas; in the faces of the ten African-American men and women murdered in a grocery store in Buffalo; in the individuals and families murdered in Ukraine, in the men and women and children worldwide who suffer for our conveniences or because we just don't love enough to try to know and do something about their suffering.

Jesus does not cause suffering, but Jesus is at the side of each of those who live woeful lives or die lonely or needless and cruel deaths. And Jesus beckons to you and me in the still small silent voice to “Come and see” what not loving means. Come and see what suffering really is. Come and see how we might love more fully and faithfully. He died and was resurrected not for a select few, sorry St. Augustine. He died and was resurrected for all people for all time.

It was not about believing rightly for Jesus, it never was. For Jesus it was always about loving and loving the very “least of these.” As he said in the Gospel according to Matthew:

“Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world, for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me. Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you? And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me.’”²

When we live our lives like no other lives matter especially the lives of the stranger, the hungry, the naked, the thirsty, and the imprisoned we have failed to live our lives the way Jesus teaches us to do and to which Jesus calls us.

Come he calls. Come he pleads. Come to Jesus. He is calling for each of us to come. Answer the call with your whole body, mind and soul, because that is where true life is.

¹ Wendell Berry, *Jayber Crow* [Berkeley: Counterpoint Press, 2000] p. 295

² Matthew 24:33b-40 NRSV