

Come and See (2)

Have you ever known someone who could talk your ear off? I don't mean someone who is just a bit chatty. I mean someone who says that they just want to check in about one thing and an hour later that person is still talking. The one thing that was so important has gone by the by. Indeed, you are not sure what the one thing was to begin with, because so much ground has been covered. You do not know where this started, and you certainly do not know where or when it is going to end. If Jesus spoke anything like he is shown to speak in the Gospel of John, especially in contrast to how he speaks the synoptic gospels, he would have been one of those people. A quip among biblical scholars about Jesus in the Gospel of John is "wordy is the lamb." In John he talks and talks and talks. Today's selection is no exception. In fact, his discourse with the unnamed Samaritan woman is the longest conversation that Jesus has with any one person in all the Gospels.

This encounter with the woman at the well is remarkable for many reasons in addition to the length of the conversation. It is remarkable for the Gospel of John to show Jesus having human need. In this case thirst. In the Gospel of Mark Jesus is very human, but in John he is usually more Christ like. As he sits at the well in the heat of the day, he sees a woman approaching, and he demands rather than asks for a drink. She notes right away that it is unusual for a Jew to ask anything of a Samaritan. We can remember from Luke's telling of the Good Samaritan parable that Samaritans were the antithesis of someone capable of a good action.

Another aspect that is striking about this situation is that the woman comes to the well at high noon. The usual time to visit the well was in the cool of the morning or the cool of the evening. Carrying a large jug of water is not easy. It is better to go when the air is cool. Also, since they were all going at the same time the women could visit. This woman comes when she will not be seen or be compelled to converse with others. We are not sure why, but it is a strange choice on her part.

For centuries scholars and preachers who have noticed the unusual behavior of this woman and have presumed there was some shame she was carrying. They looked at her marital situation and leapt to sexual shame. Of course, all of those scholars and preachers were men whose minds seemed to be in the gutter, as the saying goes. Yet, there is nothing in the story to indicate that she is sinful. Jesus does not point out any sin on her part. He names her situation, but does not condemn it or tell her, as he so often does, "to go and sin no more." His encounter with her is very matter of fact.

What's more, Jesus in the early part of their discourse begins to reveal his special status to her. He tells her that if she knew who she was talking with she would have asked him for "living water." Like Nicodemus she takes Jesus' words at face value not realizing that he is talking in metaphor. What seems to be different in this situation is that the woman starts to catch on, whereas Nicodemus did not.

Another difference between these two encounters is that while Nicodemus comes to Jesus at night, this woman speaks to him in the brightness of the noontime sun. Then after they finish their initial discussion, she runs back to the village without regard for her task or that she otherwise does not interact with her neighbors. When she arrives, she becomes an evangelist, perhaps the first in all of scripture. She exhorts her neighbors to "Come and see." These same words that have shown up

before in this Gospel. Remember that early on Jesus invited John the Baptizer's disciples to "Come and see" when they were curious about him. A few verses later when Nathaniel expresses doubt that anything good can come out of Nazareth, Phillip invites him to, "Come and see." Now the Samaritan woman invites her neighbors to, "Come and see a man who has told me everything I ever done!" Remarkably, the people accept her invitation and come and see.

Her testimony is so powerful that the gospeler says that "Many of the Samaritans in the city believed in him because of the woman's testimony." They go to see Jesus and ask him to stay with them, which he does. Many more come to believe in Jesus because of his time with them.

Each week you and I come to this place or one like it to come and see for ourselves. There is something that keeps drawing us back. It could be simple habit. Although I doubt that getting up early on a Sunday morning instead of lying in bed, or cradling a second cup of coffee, or sitting on the porch watching the sky change with the rising light, can be the result of habit alone. Some people might come just for the social interaction. Somebody once told me that people were not interested in what I was preaching and teaching so much as they were interested in coffee and gossip. That may be the case for some, but I think there is something more.

I think, whether we are aware or not, that we are coming to see again, as if for the very first time, what Jesus is all about. Are the stories we have heard so many times as meaningful now as they were when we were children? Will the Eucharist be as powerful as our first communion? Will something new be revealed this week that we had not witnessed before? They are good and important questions.

John's disciples were being a bit shy when they asked Jesus what he was up to. Nathaniel was being snarky when he asked Phillip if anything good could come out of Nazareth. The Samaritan woman was overcome by the revelation that Jesus just might be the Messiah for whom they have waited. Each was invited or invited others to "Come and see." Experience this man for yourself. See what he is up to. See what he is teaching. See because "seeing is believing" as the old saying goes.

That is what you and I are up to each Sunday. We come to see. We come to experience. We come to meet God in Christ Jesus eye to eye. We come and we see for ourselves the goodness of God.