

Epworth Chapel on the Green  
January 19, 2014  
Second Sunday after Epiphany  
Rev. Dr. Brook Thelander

Isaiah 49:1-7  
Psalm 40:1-14  
I Corinthians 1:1-9  
John 1:29-41

We find ourselves now in the season after the Epiphany, where our Scripture lessons in these weeks will describe for us several different epiphanies, or manifestations of God's divine power.

Now when we think of the word "epiphany," it may be easy for us to think of it in terms of an extraordinary or even miraculous event. This is the case with Jesus' baptism, which we saw last week. Similarly, the wise men who traveled from the East following the star is a rather miraculous event. And even John the Baptist, when he sees the Spirit descending on Jesus, sees the power of God at work and declares, "there is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

But are epiphanies always extraordinary and miraculous displays?

Take a look at today's Gospel lesson. Near the end of the lesson, John tells us that Andrew and another disciple begin to follow Jesus. Jesus turns and asks them a simple question: "What do you want?" The Greek could be rendered, "what are you seeking?" or "what are you looking for?"

On the surface, this is just a simple question. But on another level, it is the deep, heart-felt question of our lives. What are you seeking in life? What are you looking for? What is it that you *really* want?

For these two men, their faith journey begins with curiosity, with the desire to know more. So they reply, “Rabbi, where are you staying?”

Again, on the surface, this seems a simple question. But on another level, it is much deeper. Their question, “where are you staying?” is not just a question about Jesus’ lodging arrangements. When they ask, “where are you staying?” the word for “staying” is the word “abide” or “remain,” which is a key word in John’s Gospel.

Recall chapter 15, and the discussion about the vine and the branches, and the call of the disciples to “abide” or “remain” in Jesus so that they might bear fruit.

Recall also chapter 17, where Jesus speaks of how he and the Father are one, and how he “abides” or “remains” in the Father just as the Father “abides” in him.

Behind this question to Jesus, “where are you staying?” then, is the question of *who* Jesus is and *what* he is all about. If we were using the language of Hollywood and movie-making, we might ask the question today by saying, “So, Jesus, what is your motivation?”

And when it comes to struggling through life and trying to find meaning and trying to make sense of it all, people today are not that different from Andrew and the other pilgrim who approached Jesus.

Ours is a world where people are going through life not sure of what they want, but they are going through hell to get it. So at some point they often will turn to Jesus, and ask, “hey Jesus, what’s your motivation? What’s your agenda? What’s your take on poverty, homelessness, the war on terror? What’s the secret to a happy and successful life?”

We think if we could just get an hour alone with Jesus at the local Starbucks and run our litany of questions by him, at the end of that hour things would all be cleared up and life would be in perspective. For life in today’s world is messy, and we need answers.

“Hey, Jesus, what’s it all about? What does it all mean?” We’re not always sure what we’re looking for, but we are happy to let someone -- even Jesus -- take a shot at telling us.

And in response to our questions Jesus does an amazing thing. He says: “Come, and see.”

This is so amazing to me. Jesus does not try to “prove” himself or legitimize himself. If I’d have been Jesus, I’d have grabbed John the Baptist and recorded a 30 minute infomercial, complete with testimonials about how I was the real deal.

Not Jesus. What Jesus offers is not a set of answers, not a formula for success, but a *simple invitation*. Come and see.

Why is this? Why is it that when we need answers to the deep questions of life, Jesus says, “come and see”?

Maybe it’s because the deepest longings of life often begin to come into focus with the realization that what we need is not *answers*, but *relationship*. Relationship with our Creator. Relationship with one another.

Sometimes in life answers aren’t enough, because what we need is not merely the facts, but the *context* which gives the facts their meaning. That context is found in the *process* that takes shape through relationships.

And so, Jesus doesn’t offer answers. He offers himself. He offers a relationship, a journey, a context in which the answers make sense. He says, “Come and see.”

I wish I could tell you this morning that I have had an epiphany experience like John the Baptist had. It would be great to be able to tell you that I have seen some sort of miraculous manifestation like the earth trembling or the heavens splitting open.

I haven’t.

All I can really speak to you about today is what I’ve observed and encountered during 50 years where I’ve often scratched my head and asked myself,

“What’s it all about, anyway?” All I can offer you is what I’ve noticed whenever I’ve gone to Jesus confused and perplexed and said, “help, Jesus, I need answers.”

And what I’ve noticed and observed and heard every time is this reply:

*Come and see.*

**When answers aren’t enough, we will often find an invitation to relationship. An invitation to draw near to the heart of God by spending time with Jesus. An invitation to sort life out not by putting check marks in the boxes next to our questions, but by walking with Jesus and paying attention to who he is and what he does.**

Amazingly, one of the places we often encounter Jesus’ invitation to us to “Come and see” is at the Lord’s Table. For it is at the Table where Jesus gives us his grace. At the Table he offers us *himself*, not just answers to our questions.

So come today with joy. Come with the knowledge that the Son of God makes himself known to you as the Light of the world. It may be through an extraordinary manifestation. Or it may be through a sincere invitation that turns your whole life into an epiphany. Either way, it’s a miracle of grace.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.