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2 Epiphany A: John 1:29-41

St. Anne's Episcopal Parish, Annapolis, MD

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Come and See

I like to run. One of my favorite experiences on a run was when we lived in Chicago, close to Lake Michigan. Chicago has a fantastic path along the lake where runners who get an early enough start can watch the sun rise over the lake. It was not unusual to see people pause at sunrise -- just stop where they were, turn, and quietly watch as the sky broke open, color spilled forth, and the miracle happened once again -- the sunrise, a new dawn, a new day. But one morning, shortly after the sun came up, it was different. Not the quiet, private welcoming of dawn, but people actually started to talk with one another. Look! Do you see it? To people who hadn't stopped, people flagged them down and said, "Look! Don't miss this! Do you see it?" A rainbow appeared -- bright, full, stretching across the horizon, an early morning spectacle -- so dazzling, so beautiful, so unexpected, no one wanted anyone to miss it. Look! Do you see it?"

Do you see it? Don't miss it.

In our Gospel lesson this morning, two people have been following John the Baptist. John tells them -- "Look! There is Jesus. He is the Lamb of God!" Just like that, they leave John the Baptist and follow Jesus. Jesus hears the sound of their sandals crunching on the gravel behind him. He turns and asks them, "What are you looking for?" They answer, "Where are you staying?" He says to them, "Come and see."

Come and see. The most simple of invitations. No pre-requisites, no entrance exams, no hoops to jump through, no checking of credentials, no waivers, calculations, feasibility studies, no last five stubborn pounds to lose, no measuring up, no dressing down. No denunciation of the other side,

no harsh rhetoric. Discipleship starts with the most simple of invitations, Come and see.

It still does. Madeleine L'Engle wrote, "We do not draw people to Christ by loudly discrediting what they believe, by telling them how wrong they are and how right we are, but by showing them a light that is so lovely that they want with all their hearts to know the source of it."ⁱ Come and see.

Discipleship, following Jesus, starts with these simple actions, come and see. Begin. One foot in front of the other. See for yourself. That's it.

If you take one thing away this morning, take this. That's where we all start. That's where we can all start in inviting others. Come and see.

But I'm not sitting down yet, because this remains the invitation for all of us – Come and see, whether we are brand new at this or we met Jesus long ago, already love hanging out in the places he promised to be and being with the people in whom we see him at work. Come and see, even if we already try to keep up with him where he calls us to go. Come and see, even if we already try to remember he is our closest companion, our shepherd, shield, and guide. Come and see, because we keep needing to show up and look -- draw near to Jesus Christ, and see with his eyes, and this will be our life-long work.

The word for "see" is not a superficial glance. It's not just using our retinas and pupils and optic nerves to make sense of the data in front of us. The word for "see" here can be translated as perceive, understand, recognize, experience. As Jan Richardson says, Jesus calls us "to the kind of seeing that opens a door, a seeing that draws us into a journey that will change us in ways we cannot know or imagine at the outset."ⁱⁱ

Come and see deeply, perceive, understand. Understanding, seeing deeply, truly, may start with having our own vision checked. Porter Taylor, who is the Bishop of Western North Carolina, writes, "We are all blind in one way or another; we all have prejudged people to some extent, and see in the other person what we expect to see. Expanding our vision requires an act of will: unless we make an effort to remove our filters, we will always see another person less than clearly. Ask yourself, "Who is it that I cannot see as a child of God? Whom have I placed outside of the circle of those I

deem worthy? Of course, there are those obvious categories of race and class and nationality . . . that may tempt us to prejudge. But we make people into lepers in more subtle ways, as well: What are your politics? What degrees do you have? What teams do you root for? What church do you go to?" Taylor continues, "Once I asked a friend, an ardent Republican, 'What do you do about your politics when you talk to your friends who are Democrats?' She said, 'It's easy. I don't have any friends who are Democrats.'"ⁱⁱⁱ (The story would work the same if the parties were reversed.)

Come and see. Come to Jesus and allow him to retrain our vision, refocus what we see and how we see. We get a glimpse of how Jesus sees in this passage. The very first words he speaks in the Gospel of John are, "What are you looking for?" a question asked of others, inviting them to talk with him. Not a pronouncement, not a thesis, not an answer – a question. A conversation starter. Jesus wants to be in conversation with them. He sees people as people, with needs and desires. He treats them with dignity by inviting them to a conversation. Not, let me tell you a thing or two, but "what are you looking for?" So receptive, so respectful, so open to possibility. The two who respond also show us the holy pattern – they ask a question of Jesus. They actually engage in conversation. They don't respond with a diatribe or a judgment. They ask Jesus, "Where are you staying?"

Come and see. Come and see, because in Jesus, God came to us, and through the power of the Holy Spirit, comes to us still. Come and see, so we can see like Jesus sees – regarding everyone as loveable, regarding no one as beyond God's reach. God's embrace is wide and God's good news is for all. Jesus sees that and wants us to see it too. We come and see so we can seek and serve Christ in all people, as our baptismal vow says.

Right vision, seeing Jesus so we can see as he sees is so important. The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., knew this. He knew about seeing with the eyes of God's love, seeing deeply, understanding truly. He wrote, "The good neighbor looks beyond the external accidents and discerns those inner qualities that make all men human and, therefore, brothers." Dr. King also knew that seeing one another with love is crucial, because hatred destroys our vision. He wrote, "Like an unchecked cancer, hate corrodes the personality and eats away its vital unity. Hate destroys a man's sense of values and his objectivity. It causes him to describe the beautiful as ugly and

the ugly as beautiful, and to confuse the true with the false and the false with the true.” Come and see, really see.

We still need that vision – vision informed by love. We need it in big ways and small.

Tom Long tells a story about this: A woman once shared that when she was little her parents would often tell her about the Sunday she was baptized. They would describe the baptismal gown she wore, what hymns were sung, what the preacher had said. Her father would always say, “Oh sweetheart, the Holy Spirit was in the church that day!”

She said that as a child she would go to church on Sundays and wonder, where is the Holy Spirit? She wanted to see this Spirit. She would look around at the rafters, at the organ pipes, the stained glass windows, and wonder, “Is *that* where the Holy Spirit is in this church?”

She said, last winter, I lost both my parents to cancer in the same week, a terrible week. During that awful week, on a dark Wednesday afternoon, I was driving home from visiting my parents in the hospital, and I was passing by the church. I felt an intense need to pray, and so I came into the church and sat in one of the back pews and began to pray. The church was dark and in the shadows, I prayed and poured out my grief to God, and cried from the bottom of my heart. A member of the church, she said, was there, and she saw me praying and knew what was happening in my life. She came and sat beside me in the pew, held my hand, and prayed with me. It was then,” the young woman said, “that I saw where the Holy Spirit was in this church.”^{iv}

She had been seen by someone, her sister in Christ, a member of her church, a fellow follower of Christ. She had been seen by someone not afraid to come near, because God came near, and because Jesus said come and see.

Come and see me, says Jesus, at work in the world around us. Come and see your neighbor as I see them, with eyes of love and understanding. See them as I see you.

ⁱ In *Madeleine L'Engle Herself: Reflections on a Writing Life*, compiled by Carole Chase. Shaw Books, 2001.

ⁱⁱ Jan Richardson, the Painted Prayerbook. www.paintedprayerbook.com. On January 16, 2011.

ⁱⁱⁱ G. Porter Taylor, *From Anger to Zion: An Alphabet of Faith*. Church Publishing, 2004, p. 26.

^{iv} From a story in in Thomas G. Long, *Testimony: Talking Ourselves into Being Christian*. Jossey-Bass, 2004, 127-28.