

January 15, 2023
Second Sunday of the Epiphany
Morning Prayer Service
The Rev. Deacon Corey Walmer

“I remember this like it was yesterday. It was about four o’clock in the afternoon. We had been with John for weeks, listening to him admonish folks to repent, to prepare their hearts, to get ready for the coming Messiah, which he was pretty sure was imminent. People were being baptized as a sign of their repentance. I sometimes helped with that. I remember crowds of people gathering out there in the desert to hear him; it was not an easy message and I was continually surprised that so many showed up. Not an easy message and not an easy guy in general. He took no care in how he dressed and personal grooming was not his strong suit. He ate whatever could be found nearby, which sometimes meant locusts. We disciples of John did as he did, but I think we noticed it more; he had this sharp, focused intensity that kind of overrode anything else. We felt it too; his clear certainty that he had an important job to do and now was the time to do it. He felt “sent” from God to do this work, to proclaim that God was about to do something really big and maybe really soon. And we had to get ready. Many folks heard his message, repented and were baptized. His convictions were contagious; we too wanted to jump on this train; so we listened, helped, spread the news ourselves too.

The funny thing about John was that while he had such clarity that the Messiah was coming soon, he really had no clue when or how or who it might be. Sure, the scriptures gave lots of clues; the Book of Isaiah especially; it made references to a child being born of the House of David, but other than the strange stories that circulated many years ago (mostly by shepherds who saw a huge star that led them to a baby in a

barn), the reality of God showing up in person was pretty abstract. Given our political oppression under Roman rule, now would certainly be a great time in my opinion. Maybe a mighty King who would re-order our world and put down the oppressors, like when the Red Sea parted and the children of Israel were able to pass through and escape their Egyptian foes. Yes, that might be a good move for God if he showed up about now, I remember thinking.

So here's where things got really interesting: John was baptizing in the River Jordan when Jesus (John's cousin by the way), showed up to be baptized. There was a shift in John then, something we all heard and saw. Everything got really still. The air kind of vibrated, like there was a lot of static electricity in the air. There was a deep recognition, no doubt; John perceived that Jesus was the One he had been waiting for; the one for whom he did not feel worthy enough to untie his sandals; enough so that John didn't want to baptize Jesus but wanted Jesus to baptize him instead. Then when Jesus insisted that he be baptized, we all saw, when he came up out of the water, an energy, a light, a dove above his head. And, John told us, this was the sign he had been told to look for, of the coming of the Son of God to this world. We were witnesses.

The rest of that day was surreal; a blur. We knew we had experienced something incredibly profound, both otherworldly and as real as the damp smell of wet linen from the river. We didn't really know what to make of it or what it might mean moving forward. It's one thing to think about the Messiah as a fulfillment of prophecy and quite another to see the Lamb of God, dripping wet, so clearly identified in person. This was a BIG story, unfolding right in front of us! To say we were curious was an understatement!

The next day, we were with John again, I remember, and Jesus walked by. John exclaimed, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!" I remember my friend and I looked at each other and without a word, felt compelled to follow. We walked away from John without looking back; like our work with him was done. When the man Jesus saw that we were following him, he asked us what we were looking for? The million dollar question! We really weren't sure! He certainly wasn't John but there was something about him that felt magnetic; could he really be the Messiah? We needed to know more but couldn't put that into words then. "Teacher, where are you staying?" we asked. Now, that sounds like we were asking where he was staying that night and we were. But looking back, we were also asking where we could go to be with him, to receive what he had to offer. He simply said, "Come and see." I imagine he knew we had no grasp of the enormity of what was happening; in fact, I think it has taken years for us to fully realize the truth. But that invitation, that day, it hung in the air; it was our small story. It was four o'clock. Come and see. And so we did just that. That was our call; we didn't have to have it all figured out, we just had to be curious and willing. It really was an invitation to friendship, to getting to know him better. And in that friendship, we came to believe He was the One.

Of course, I couldn't keep this to myself; I just HAD to tell my brother about Jesus and I even introduced them! And it went on from there. Others joined us; the word got out fast, and this story began to get much bigger. Later on, we became his helpers, his disciples; he gave us jobs to do but that day, all he wanted was for us to be with him. What a bumbling group we were! Some days we really didn't get it at all; other days we caught glimpses of the truth that the Messiah was right here in our midst. And he chose us, a motley collection of inarticulate

(and often clueless) folks, to help spread the message that God's kingdom had arrived on earth.

So here's the thing: Jesus continues to walk the earth! Maybe not in the flesh but by the Spirit, and He shows up in the darndest places! He continues to invite folks to come and see, to follow even if we don't get it completely. He's really okay with that; it was that way for us disciples and it is okay for you too. Things often emerge a little at a time, like buying a pair of socks for a homeless person or choosing kindness when in a grumpy mood. Sometimes even a little turning toward God can change everything. What I do know is that he wants to draw all of us to himself: that's the biggest story: Come and See, says Jesus, the Christ, and I will meet you there.

Amen