

Come and See

A Sermon from Mount Auburn Presbyterian Church

The Rev. Susan Quinn Bryan, Pastor

January 20, 2008 – Second Sunday after Epiphany

(Dedication of Communion Ware in memory of Camilla Warrick)

**Scripture Readings: Isaiah 49:1-7; Psalm 40:1-11;
1 Corinthians 1:1-9; John 1:29-42**

When some of the first disciples began to follow Jesus, he turned and asked them, “What are you looking for?” They called him Rabbi, or teacher, and asked, “Where are you staying?”

His response was, “Come and see.”

We are told that they did go with him and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. One of those disciples was Andrew, and after spending time with Jesus, he found his brother, Simon Peter, and said to him, “We have found the Messiah.”

And their lives were forever changed.

Seeing. That’s what epiphany is about. Seeing life differently.

Come and see is the invitation to not just seeing life differently, but living life differently.

In his little book, ‘The Life of the Beloved,’ Henri Nouwen uses the words we speak each time communion is instituted as an outline for what it means to be a person of faith, what it means to be so called, so transformed by ‘seeing.’ “And their eyes were opened and they recognized him,” we are told in post resurrection texts.

Just as Jesus took bread, blessed the bread, broke the bread and gave the bread to the disciples at the Passover meal the night before his arrest; we, as the church, are taken – called – set apart, to be blessed, broken, and given in service to God.

Those are the motifs that are found in our texts today, and so appropriate for a day on which we dedicate a beautiful new communion set in memory of Camilla Warrick.

In Isaiah, written in the midst of the exile, where all futures seemed bleak, the poet dares to speak about a servant powered by God.

The prophet, Isaiah, uses some powerful imagery to describe the character of God’s calling:

“The Holy One called me before I was born, while I was in my mother’s womb, God named me . . .”

It is difficult for us to imagine a call that with no right to refuse, but that is exactly what the Servant describes, and what Nouwen also pointed out. God *takes us*; it is God’s initiative, not ours. In a song Holly Near sang, she spoke of seeing truth in such a powerful way that it was as if her eyelids had been burned away, and she could no longer NOT see.

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That is the power in an epiphany. The power in God's truth being revealed, one must then share that truth. Called. Empowered.

It is not always clear of whom Isaiah is speaking, at one point the servant seems to be all of Israel, the whole people of God, just as God's call is on all of God's people. God acts first in our lives. At other points the servant appears to have a mission *to* Israel.

The poem may deliberately avoid a specific identity, permitting us great freedom in our hearing.

But the communal, even public, character of faith remains the same. God calls us not to a merely private piety, but to service to all, in community with others who are also called. We are called to be not just the beloved, but the Beloved Community. The truth is in the interconnectedness of all life – how can one witness to that in isolation? Doesn't the truth itself call us into the struggle and joy of community?

While the psalmist speaks of seeking after God, it is God who puts the "new song" in the mouth of the psalmist.

God acts first, and acts in our lives for the sake of others. As the psalmist says, "Many will see and be in awe of God, and put their trust in the Holy One."

Paul, who elsewhere uses the imagery of those same texts from Isaiah to describe his own transformation, identifies both himself and the Christians of Corinth as those 'called' to be God's people.

In our text today, as in the prologue to the gospel of John, John the Baptizer is identified as one who has been sent for a specific task. From the greatest figures in the history of Israel and the life of the church to the most anonymous women and man, God's servants have their role as a result of God's calling. A call that is lived out in and for the community.

The callings of God's servants vary as greatly as the contexts in which they find themselves, but calling is always toward healing, and wholeness of the whole of humanity.

Even in the opening lines of his letter to the Corinthians, Paul makes it clear that it is not enough for believers to cherish a private faith; their public fellowship with one another must reflect the unity of their faith.

John the Baptist proclaims the revelation he has received about Jesus, not in order to enlarge himself as recipient, but to bear witness to Jesus.

"Come and see." Jesus tells those first disciples.

What did they see?

What was revealed to them?

Colin Morris may give us a glimpse of what they saw, who they saw, when they were with Jesus.

"If you ask yourself what were the characteristics of the mind of Jesus, there are two in particular that it seems to me are quite crucial.

The first is that it was a mind that was massively concerned with specifics rather than universals . . . He was a man with a burning obsession. His spiritual and mental energy was not diversified into the business of bringing light in whole areas of human ignorance.

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It was a burning obsession with the (kingly) rule of God – not as an academic thesis, but as promise and as presence and as judgment in the midst of life.

. . . The other characteristic of the mind of Jesus, which seems to me to be very relevant to this business of encountering others, is the fact that he had a *“crucified rather than a crusading mind.”* The term is Kosuke Koyama’s, who, being Japanese, was at the receiving end of the triumphalist tradition of the . . . western missionary enterprise – someone who was accustomed to being at the receiving end of the “crusading mind” . . .

The “crucified mind” . . . is a mind that is conscious of the mystery of the other person, that recognizes the sovereignty of the rights of another person, of the authenticity of their inner suffering, and is very careful about making judgments.

. . . The evolution of the crucified mind comes about because of a willingness to accept all the pain of human encounter, all its bane and blessing, all its joy and misery; to regret none of it except that which is futile, and to repent none of it other than that which is sinful. And it is that kind of mind that characterizes the Christian encounter with others.”

That, then, raises another question: what do other see when they come into our midst?

Do they experience us sharing the gospel of love and acceptance in all that we do? Here, at the table, everyone is welcome. No matter what.

But, are we just as welcoming, just as open during coffee hour?

Are we willing to overcome our shyness to welcome the stranger in our midst?

We are thrilled to see our friends, people that we haven’t seen all week, but are we just as moved to welcome someone we have yet to meet?

Do visitors hear our stories of God’s grace and love in our lives?

Do they know we seek to follow Jesus? That we long for God’s kin-dom with the passion of Christ? That we seek ways to live that justice in every aspect of our lives?

Today, we dedicate these lovely pottery pieces to God in memory of Camilla Warrick, who was instrumental in Mount Auburn’s policy of open communion, and one who knew well the importance of such radical inclusion, and the connectedness of all of life.

This day, the day before we celebrate the life of another called by God to proclaim that same truth, another disciple of Jesus, one with a crucified mind, Martin Luther King, we remember that the Beloved Community is not yet a reality, but that it is still a dream we share.

We remember the words of Jean Vanier, another disciple with a crucified mind, when he said:

"And if today we cannot drink all together from the same chalice of the blood of Christ, let us drink together from the chalice of suffering: the suffering of division, the division among ourselves, and the division with the poor and the suffering. Let us renew then with greater humility our total trust in Jesus, life of the world."

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So today, as we dedicate this communion ware to the glory of God in Camilla's memory, we dedicate ourselves to being the Beloved Community, a place where everyone can come and feel welcome, fed, accepted, and authentic.

Thanks be to God.

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