

Come and See! Year A Epiphany 2 John 1:29-42

Today on the church calendar we see it is the second Sunday of Epiphany—a season we don't celebrate too much as Protestants, but one that is part of our tradition, nonetheless. We Protestants, if we think about Epiphany at all, tend to limit it to one day, January 6, and we don't think about it much more after that. Many times we even cram the story of the wise men into Christmas Eve as if everything that happened around the birth of Jesus happened all on the same night. They have become a part of our nativity displays and pageants because I think we don't quite know what to do with these Wise Men, or Magi, whichever we call them; even the lectionary has moved on at this point and doesn't say anything more about these elusive figures in the Christ story. We know that Herod tried to use them for his own purpose, but that they were made aware of his treachery and "left by another road" as the scripture says.

But whenever I read this story the question comes: what made these ancient people follow that star? What motivated them to seek something that they had only heard about in their prophecies and legends? And what is the significance for us that their prophecies and legends lead them to come into the presence of the Christ child, who in turn was the fulfillment of other prophecies and legends in a faith tradition that has been handed down, generation to generation, to us? I mean, they didn't have angel chorusus heralding the good news of Jesus' birth to them, all they had was a star, and I ask you, would *you* follow a star? Would you pick up and leave your home and family, just to bring presents to someone you'd only imagined would ever exist?

This is a question I always think of about this time of year. I've always been one to jump at the chance for a journey, the opportunity to travel for any reason. I enjoy seeing new places, seeing different scenery; and not only that, but it's never been a big deal to me to pack up and move to another city, another state even—you might have guessed that about me since I'm here! You may have heard me talk about the way Jeff and Nick and Jen and I moved several times over the course of our life together; the first time was from Knoxville to Atlanta for Jeff to take a new job, then back to our hometown and on to Louisville for seminary; then back to Knoxville and then here. My sense of call, coincidentally, came right around the time that I felt God calling me to ministry, after I had an encounter with Christ; and since there is a PCUSA seminary in Atlanta I took this to mean that the move was not only for the new job but also for me to attend that seminary. I was feeling called and felt that this move affirmed my sense of call, and so I was gung-ho for the move, even though it meant a new home, a new church, a new job. I was ready to go.

Only Jeff's job didn't last. And when I went to visit the seminary, it didn't seem like a good fit, for me or for our family. The journey south didn't pan out, the star I thought I was following wasn't the right star at all. But still the call was there; while in Atlanta I had opportunities for ministry that I wouldn't have had in Knoxville, opportunities to explore this sense of call that I was feeling.

Our scripture passages today speak to this idea of encountering Jesus, and heeding the call to come and see.. In the passage from John it is the day after Jesus' baptism and John sees Jesus as they are out and about each doing their own thing. John witnesses to his encounter: Here he is, the one who takes away the sins of the world! He is here to reveal God to everyone—and I know it because I saw the Spirit alight on his head! This is why I baptize you- so you will be ready for him, because he is the Son of God! John is talking about his encounter with Jesus the day before, when Jesus came to him for baptism—remember last week we talked about John being shocked that Jesus had come to him for baptism. It certainly wasn't what John expected from the one who would be the Messiah! And yet John seems to have accepted and embraced this new idea of who and what the Messiah would be.

The opening of Paul's letter to the I Corinthians is a similar reminder to that community of their own encounters with Jesus. The Corinthian community was not dissimilar to our own in many ways—it was a metropolitan area, urban and alive with a mix of cultures and types of people. Unfortunately this environment and the fact that this new community of Christians had been immersed in it and were still trying to live in the midst of it even as their new counter-cultural way of life took hold. There was a split of sorts brewing, between followers of Paul and followers of Apollos, who was another evangelist; there were arguments about whose spiritual gifts were more important and whether or not Christ was going to return—again, not dissimilar to what churches face today. Different arguments, but arguments nonetheless. It was not an easy thing to be a Christ follower in that time, just as it can be hard to follow Christ today. But Paul reminds the Corinthians that the only thing that matters is Christ, which has given them free and open access to God—that Christ called them to “come and see” and that led them directly to God. I'm not sure what they Corinthians were expecting when they came to Jesus, but evidently it wasn't what they thought because Paul has to remind them to hang in there because all who call out to Jesus have God with them to help them until Christ returns.

Often our encounters with Jesus Christ aren't what we expect. I never expected an encounter with Jesus like I had—I don't know why, I just never expected it. Nor did I expect it to come with the expectations of me that it did—expectations that I go to seminary, that I become a minister of word and sacrament or teaching elder or pastor or preacher or whatever you want to call it. The

expectation that I serve God in any sort of way. And I'm sure I'm not the only one here who has had such an encounter. Perhaps during an illness, or a loss of some sort. Perhaps at a cross-roads in your life. Perhaps during military service or on the job. I know there are stories out there. They are probably not like Nathaniel's, or like mine, and that's ok; we each have our own way of meeting Christ. And I'd love to hear them, and I'd love for the rest of the congregation to hear them. You may have shared them before, I don't know; but it's good for us to share our stories over and over again. That's the way our ancestors in the faith passed down that faith, by telling the stories. By talking about our encounters with Christ and how they changed us and how they changed our lives. So if you'd like to share your story with the congregation, let me know and we'll find a time and a way for you to do so. It is something we all must do, to strengthen our own faith. To strengthen the faith of those who come alongside us and after us.

In the second part of the passage from John two of John the Baptist's disciples encountered Jesus, who asked them, "what are you after?" They replied, "Where are you staying?" to which Jesus replied "Come along and see for yourself." This what Christ says to all who call out to him, who look to him for comfort, for purpose, for answers to their deepest questions: Come and see. It is what he said to the Corinthians as they lived out their faith in a challenging place: Come and see. And it's what he says to each one of us and anyone who encounters him through us: come and see. Come and see, and I will give you life. Come and see and we will work through this together. Come and see. Amen.