

Sermon on John 1:35-42 1.15.23 MLK Jr. Weekend



"Come and See" by Lauren Wright Pittmann | A Sanctified Art LLC | sanctifiedart.org

John 1:35-42

³⁵ The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, ³⁶ and as he watched Jesus walk by he exclaimed, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!"³⁷ The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. ³⁸ When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, "What are you looking for?" They said to him, "Rabbi" (which translated means Teacher), "where are you staying?" ³⁹ He said to them, "Come and see." They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon. ⁴⁰ One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. ⁴¹ He first found his brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated Anointed). ⁴² He brought Simon^[b] to Jesus, who looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas" (which is translated Peter^[d]).

Sermon

“What are you looking for?” If you had one of those red letter Bibles—where everything scholars think Jesus red said is written in red—those would be the first words in the gospel of John marked in red. “What are you looking for?” It’s interesting, isn’t? That those are Jesus’ first words in the gospel of John. He speaks them to Andrew and Andrew’s brother, Simon Peter after they see Jesus walking by, and they decide to follow him.

It’s a good question for us this morning – in this new year – in this season of Epiphany. Dear First UCC, what are you looking for? What is the deepest longing in your heart right now?

Andrew and Simon Peter’s response to Jesus’ question is pretty interesting. The reading makes it sound like they changed the subject altogether. “What are you looking for,” Jesus asked them, looking deep into their soul.” And they say, “Uh, ummmm...so, are you staying at the Fairfield Inn, or an Airbnb?”

But the Greek words are more intriguing than that. When Andrew and Simon Peter ask Jesus where he’s staying, they’re not asking about location. Literally their question means, “Where are you abiding.” *Abide* is one of the gospel of John’s favorite words. The author used over 40 times to describe God’s relationship with God’s people. It means to remain, to stay, to continue to dwell with, to stay.”

Jesus asks the disciples, “What are you looking for?” and they say, “we are looking for the place you abide. The place where you live. That’s what we are looking for.” So of course Jesus doesn’t say, “Oh, easy, the Nazareth Inn. They’ve got great prices and a continental breakfast.” No, Jesus says, “Come and see. Join me and you’ll see. Let’s walk together, and where I abide will be where you abide.”

So I asked you, dear first UCCers, as we continue in Epiphany, the season of revealing and enlightening, what are you looking for? What are you wondering, and what do you long to live into more fully? What do you feel like you’re learning, or what is being revealed in you?

Come and see. That’s Jesus’ invitation to us. Jesus doesn’t say “stay and watch;” we are not observers. He says come and see; be a participant in this. He invites people into their own senses and experiences as they learn from Jesus and gather from their own experiences who he is, exactly, and what he’s about. The same is true for us. We are welcome, invited, to move our perspectives or our bodies and follow, to learn who Jesus is. I’m glad we get to “come and see” together as we learn and lean into our questions in community.

One of the things I felt we needed to come and see, to lean more deeply into is the art that’s on the cover of your bulletins today. It’s by Rev. Lauren Wright Pittman. You might recognize her art from our Sanctified Art series’ in Advent or Lent. I included the artist’s statement on the back of your bulletins because her message is important. I invite you to look at the bulletin art while I read part of her statement to you:

“Come and See.” Come—Jesus calls us to move, to change our position and see things from a new perspective. See—Jesus invites us into a spirit of curiosity, to open our eyes and to strive to take in the vastness of whoever is before us. As the disciples come together, each with their own experiences and particularities, a patchwork understanding of Jesus is pieced together. Like a relay, they pass to one another a glimpse of who Jesus is, and the picture gains more detail, complexity, and texture.

“As the disciples come together, a patchwork understanding of Jesus is pieced together...and the picture gains more detail, complexity, and texture.” I read that and then I look out at all of

you and I see people coming together, each with our own experiences and particularities, and a patchwork of Jesus is pieced together. Right at First UCC. Together – together we make up the body of Christ. Just like the colors of the followers’ robes are reflected in Jesus’ garment. The patterns of their robes reflected in his halo.

Then I read “Like a relay, they pass to one another a glimpse of who Jesus is, and the picture gains more detail,” and I think about all the people before us whom we needed to get to this place. Who passed on the meaning or faith to you? Who inspired you, or brought you to church, or who loved you like Jesus--passing on a baton of who Jesus is to you--as a next generation to carry the inspiration or faith onward?

That’s why I love this image so much – look at the unique image on each person’s clothes, an image that pertains only to them. John has locusts and honey and some baptism droplets. Andrew has jars of oil for seeing Jesus as the anointed one. Peter has fish swimming around a rock (because Peter means “little rock”). Notice that their unique images and unique colors included in Jesus’ robe and halo.

The beauty of this text, Lauren Wright Pittman says, is that we need one another—from our particular, unique points of view—to be able to find understanding and to begin to take in the full picture of ourselves and the world around us. We need one another to discover the fullness of who Jesus is.

I love that—we need one another—to test our perspectives, to challenge and to affirm one another. To be there for one another in lonely, or sick, or grieving, or difficult times, and in joyful times too. We need one another, not just because I believe it, but because I think it’s integral to a deeper understanding of our scripture this morning. This is the call of the people who followed Jesus. Who then called other people to learn about Jesus. Who then called others people to learn about and follow Jesus. Who is the person or people – that if it weren’t for them – you wouldn’t be here right now? The people who invited you into deeper meaning, new ways of living? Who invited you into this odd and wondrous calling to be a person of faith? And who invited them?

As we turn our hearts and minds to Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. on this his birthday weekend, we often think about the impact MLK had on others and how his life and legacy can continue to impact us. But we don’t often wonder about who influenced him. Who invited him to “come and see?”

I recently learned that Rev. Dr. King carried 3 books with him at all times.¹ He carried the United States Constitution, and the Bible, as well as one other book. Always the same book. It was Howard Thurman’s *Jesus and the Disinherited*. Howard Thurman was an American author, philosopher, theologian, mystic, educator, and civil rights leader.

In his first line of the book, Howard Thurman says that the most crucial part of Christianity is the significance it has on people who stand with their backs against the wall. The key part of Christianity is the impact it has on the poor, the disinherited and dispossessed. That’s the first line of the one book that Martin Luther King Jr. carried with him wherever he went. *The most crucial part of Christianity* is for people who live with their backs against the

¹ Mentioned in multiple places by Rev. Otis Moss III including here: Rev. Otis Moss III, interview with Krista Tippett for “On Being,” 2020, <https://onbeing.org/programs/rev-otis-moss-iii-the-sound-of-the-genuine-traversing-2020-with-the-mystic-of-the-movement-howard-thurman/> accessed 13 Jan 2023.

wall. Without Howard Thurman and others, there might not be a Martin Luther King, Jr.

And so it is no surprise then that Rev. Dr. King not only fought for the dignity and right of African American people in America; for the human civil rights of this group of people, it is no surprise that he not only and gave dynamic speeches that drew crowds. It then is also no surprise to learn about the less popular parts of Dr. King's work. He took up the mantle to fight for the rights of *all* people with their backs against the walls. Standing against the Vietnam War when it was not popular to do so. Fighting for sanitation workers in Memphis, and other laborers, people who weren't just classified as black. These things that did not make him America's convenient hero.

When it comes to Howard Thurman, the place where Jesus' abided, the place where Jesus lived was beside those with their backs against the wall. And Howard Thurman became a voice to young Martin Luther King Jr., saying, "come and see." And Rev. Dr. King saw what Thurman saw in the eyes of Jesus.

And before King and before Thurman was Thurman's grandmother who kept the faith in Jesus despite America's Christians enslaving her. Who came before Thurman's grandmother? And before them? If we could follow the trail, we might walk ourselves all the way back to this moment in our gospel, where Jesus asked those disciples, "What are you looking for?" And they respond, "To abide with you. To be where you are. To live how you live," they said. To which Jesus replied, "Come and see."

Who said, "Come and see" to you? To whom have you said, "Come and see?" Go back to the bulletin image with these ideas in mind. Imagine there's a figure there with an uncolored robe. Who would that figure be for you who invited you to come and see? What would be on their robe, that would be added to Jesus' halo? Without them, there would be no you in this community, this faith, this church, this moment. What would their robe have on it that summarizes them? And who wouldn't be here without you? To whom have you said, "Come and see?" Without _____ there would be no _____. Without _____ there would be no _____. Without Poppy where would any of us be?"

"What are you looking for?" Jesus asked the disciples before inviting them on a journey to change their lives and change the world. "What are you looking for? It is a question worth wrestling with — as individuals, as congregations, as communities — since our answers will have a great deal to do with what we find as well as with the journey we take to get there. What are you seeking? What motivates you? What is that you really need, not just on the surface, but deep down into the core of your being? What are you looking for?"²

Spend time looking inward, figuring out what is on your garment as you experience the world around you, as we continue to follow Jesus together. What you find, and what you have to share is important for us all, for the sake of the world, for the sake of the common good. What you seek, long for, and what you find is worthy, beautiful, and good. Let us come and see together. Amen.

² Audrey West, <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/second-sunday-after-epiphany/commentary-on-john-129-42-3> accessed 9 Jan 2023.