

Finally – we have biblical proof that Jesus was an Episcopalian!

There he is in our Gospel reading this morning -- Walking down the street -- He is the anointed Son of God -- having just been baptized in the River Jordan.

He has been set apart by the Lord -- Called and consecrated to do God's work -- And down the road He strolls, minding his own business -- off to wherever to do whatever.

And he walks past his cousin John the Baptist, who's hanging around the street corner with two guys. -- And the next thing He knows, Jesus is being followed by those two guys.

They stay at a distance -- timid and mumbling to themselves -- until Jesus abruptly turns to face them --

And here he is -- The Messiah, Savior of the world -- The bearer and beholder of the greatest news humanity could ever hear -- And Jesus' first words to the very first people who would exhibit the slightest bit of curiosity towards his new religion -- And Jesus says --"What are you looking for?"

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Oh, I'm sure he wasn't rude about it -- he was an Episcopalian!

World-renowned as we are for our polite passivity -- Maybe it was more of an: "Excuse, me, may I help you find your way?" -- "Would you like to use my AAA Card?"

Just like you and me, Jesus seems to appear somewhat out of touch as to the value of the calling and anointing the Lord has placed on his life.

Just like you and me, Jesus appears to have other things on his mind -- and the very notion that the Lord could be breaking into his pre-set routine is, shall we say, a bit put-offish.

BUT just like you and me, Jesus seems to come around -- and now having asked the question: "what are you looking for?" -- he hears Andrew's response -- "Where are you staying?" -- and Jesus answers his two new friends with those epic words: "Come and See."

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"Come and See" -- It's the first command Jesus would give to a disciple.

"Come and See" -- These are words of invitation and action.

"Come and See" -- They are words that speak to you and me about an openness and mystery -- an inclusion and adventure --

They suggest a God who is active, not passive -- On the move, not off resting -- Alive, not dead.

*“Jesus was an Episcopalian”*

Epiphany II, Sunday, January 20, 2008

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Many of us have this imaginary picture of the Lord -- with white hair and flowing robes -- comfortably seated on a golden throne -- like Old Man Time -- waiting for his Geritol and another can of Strawberry Ensure -- don't forget the bendy straw please.

But perhaps we're better served by a more active image -- Maybe not Jack Lalane -- but someone a bit younger, vibrant and energetic -- someone who gets a spark in their eye when they say: “Come and See.”

It's not “Sit Down and Wait” -- Or “Lie Down and Get Comfortable.”

No, Jesus' life -- The Gospel as a whole -- is not passive, it's active -- it's even proactive.

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Jesus the Episcopalian. -- Head down, hard working, perhaps not fully aware of all that He has -- and all that He is -- Jesus the Episcopalian.

Oh, he does get it... eventually... he discovers His true identity.

But how does it come to Him?

It comes slowly -- It comes as the years unfold -- through a life and ministry of prayer and fellowship -- communing with God and with God's people -- hearing the words of God -- and doing the works of God.

As you and I look at the life of Jesus -- we see that He pursues his faith with all that He is -- and Jesus finally figures it out.

Maybe that's what Jesus is trying to tell the rest of His beloved Episcopal Church as well: Take part in the practices -- of prayer -- and service - and ministry -- and the study of God's words -- and love for each other and those around us -- make God a bigger part of our lives -- and this, maybe this, is how we, too, discover and understand our deepest selves -- our vocations, our callings, our yearnings for satisfaction.

This is how we, too, nurture the proactivity and excitement for life that is in each one of our souls.

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One theologian says it's how the Church has always done it.

He writes:

“The enthusiasm [over the message of Christ] which marked the early Christians is one of the most remarkable things in the history of religions. -- “Here were men and women of every rank and station in life -- “Of every country in the known world -- “So convinced that they had discovered the [answer to the] riddle of the universe -- “So sure of the one true God whom they had come to know -- “That nothing must stand in the way of their passing on this good news to others.” (Michael Green)

Indeed, nothing has. -- Well, ok, some things have. -- You and I just have to look around us here -- at the established Church in America.

It's not hard for us to believe that 75% of all Protestant churches founded more than 10 years ago are shrinking.

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One churchman says in the next 10 years, 40% of America’s churches will close. -- We’re not doing as well as we once were.

And you and I can’t help but ask ourselves some relevant “Come and See” questions.

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I know a man who has a refrigerator magnet -- You walk into his kitchen and there it is -- The magnet is captioned “Reality Evangelism.”

And it shows two pictures of a young man -- standing side by side next to each other.

The magnet shows the first young man saying, “Ya, I go to church.”

And it shows the second young man saying, “Wanna come?”

It is the movement from one magnet to the other -- It’s the difference between being a welcoming church -- and being an inviting church. -- It is such a simple affair. -- But it is one of our North American Church’s biggest challenges -- moving from a welcoming church to an inviting church.

Which begs the question – why is this so hard?

Why don’t we invite people to share our faith community?

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Well, there are several reasons -- One, is that in our culture, talking about religion and our church is taboo. -- We risk being labeled a ‘religious person’ or even worse -- a Bible Beater or - drum roll please - “an Evangelical.”

Who brings up God conversations?

It’s potentially uncomfortable -- it’s potentially divisive -- and if it’s with a member of the younger generation -- it can be downright embarrassing. -- Here’s why:

In a new book called “UnChristian” the head of the Barna research group studied three years worth of data -- and he found that an overwhelming percentage of those outside the church aged 16 to 29 year old, view Christians with hostility, resentment, and disdain.

It is an “outsider outrage” based on real experiences these young people have had with churches and other Christians.

In fact, here are the percentages of folk in this age group, outside the church, who think the following words describe present-day Christianity:

- \* 91% say present-day Christianity is Anti-homosexual
- \* 87% say Judgmental
- \* 85% say Hypocritical
- \* 78% say Old-fashioned
- \* 75% say Too political
- \* 72% say Out of touch with reality

And here’s my favorite:

- \* 68% say present day Christianity is Boring. -- now these people have not met Jim McKenzie.

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But, according to this book -- “It is hard to overestimate how firmly people reject -- “And feel rejected by – Christians.”

This is helpful information to keep in mind when you introduce yourself as a Christian to others -- a friend, neighbor, or business associate who is an outsider -- this research suggests that you might as well have it tattooed on your forehead -- “Anti-gay, hypocritical, judger.”(David Kinnaman and Dan McClendin)

Who wants to bring up Jesus in an environment like this?

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Ok, a second reason why we hesitate to bring folk to church -- to “Come and See”

A second reason is... us.

There may be several things about ourselves that dampen our enthusiasm for inviting others. -- Most Episcopalians, like Jesus, are shy.

You see, Jesus wouldn't qualify to be an Episcopalian if He wasn't shy -- We don't really talk that much about personal things to other people, period -- at least that's what we tell ourselves. -- We feel that our religion is a private matter -- and shouldn't be shared with others.

Or, we may feel like we don't have much to share. -- Our experiences with God and religion are mostly habit -- they are part of our personal culture -- something our family has believed for generations -- it's more of a social affair -- and we don't want too much God in it.

It may be because we really don't know why we believe what we believe -- so we really don't have much to pass along to anyone else anyway. -- which begs several questions:

If we are not willing to invite others into the Christian experience -- what does this say about our own experiences with Christ?

How much do we really understand the message of our beloved People's Window if we don't want to go out into the community?

These are hard 'Come and See' questions...

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And this relates to a third reason why we hesitate to be a more inviting community -- it's because of our church.

Do we really think that our congregation offers something dynamic and worth inviting people to? -- Is this place, these people, this liturgy, this way of worshipping Christ -- something we really value?

Are our services comfortable for long-time members but confusing to guests?

As Garrison Keilor puts it, “Episcopalians don't often enjoy their liturgy as much as they endure it.”

So we ask, what would people “Come and See” in our congregation? -- Is St. David's really worth inviting people to? -- If so, why do we hesitate?

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You and I have had people tell us about good restaurants -- good barbers, good doctors and informative websites.

We all know people who are constantly getting on our cases to go to a Kiwanis Club breakfast -- or to buy a particular brand of car -- or to exercise at a certain place.

We may even be one of those people.

So why are we so eager to invite people to other things -- but we clam up when it comes to mentioning the one place that is the most dear to all of us? -- arguably the most important place you and I will ever belong -- it's the place we're baptized, married, and buried.

This is not to suggest that sharing our faith and our community is easy -- it's not!

But if we look at how Jesus, the Episcopalian, grew into His ministry -- we get some great clues as to how you and I can grow, more fully, into ours.

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“My coming to faith did not start with a leap -- writes Anne Lamott -- “but rather a series of staggers from what seemed like one safe place to another -- “Like lily pads, round and green -- “These places summoned and then held me up while I grew. -- “Each prepared me for the next leaf on which I would land -- “And in this way I moved across the swamp of doubt and fear.”

Which lily pad are we on this morning?

It is fearful to jump to the next one -- but are we being subtly prodded to do so?

Can we name that lily pad? -- Is it a place of scary generosity? -- Is it a place of deeper trust that God will care for me in my latter years and beyond?

Is it a place of final abandonment -- in which Jesus is asking and we are responding -- “Ok Lord, I surrender.” -- “I give all of my life to you?”

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“Come and See” says Jesus.

And here, the New International Version puts it a bit differently:

That translation reads: “Come and you will see.”

This catches a helpful overtone. -- We are all on a journey -- one in which we “will see”.

And we don't get there overnight. -- Our journey, like all journeys begins by looking forward, not behind. -- We look to what God is doing in our midst -- and what the Lord has planned in the months and years ahead.

You and I all know, in America, in Michigan, in Detroit, even in this congregation -- we are tempted to believe that our best years are behind us.

And while that may be true for our nation, state and city -- only time will tell -- it's not true for this place.

There's too much good energy here -- there are too many good, caring and committed people.

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There is a future here that is very bright -- it is shining with the light of Christ found in every one of our souls.

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A noted business consultant was being interviewed by a newspaper reporter not long ago -- And he made this observation about corporations -- “One thing that tells me a company is in trouble is when they tell me how good they were in the past.

“Same with countries -- And one could argue, it’s the same with churches -- “You don’t want to forget your identity. -- “I am glad you were great in the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

“But that was then, and this is now. -- “When memories exceed dreams, the end is near.” -- (Michael Hammer quoted by Thomas Friedman in *The World is Flat*)

My friends, our exciting future together lies not in where we’ve been -- but where we’re going.

You and I are being asked to set aside the history books -- and to dream.

Where is St. David’s headed in 2008 and beyond?

The CEO of General Motors says: “We invented the modern corporation and now we have to re-invent it.”

God says: “I invented the modern Church and now I am reinventing it.”

And you and I have the glorious job of helping.

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“Come and See.” -- It is active not passive, isn’t it?

God has not worked and quit. -- God is working today -- even right now -- inventing and reinventing us personally and as a community.

No, we don’t know what we will look like in 10 years -- But we do know that as we take Jesus up on that standing offer -- to follow Him -- to go and see where He is leading us - - that is the place we really want to be.

There are no assurances, no guarantees, no insurance policies for sale -- We have only the promise of the beloved one -- Found in the testimony of Holy Scripture -- The lives of two millennia of saints -- And that tugging in our hearts that urges us onward to the next lily pad.

An invitation that we can’t pass up -- Yes, we will follow -- We will come and see.

***Amen.***

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Lessons:

Isaiah 49:1-17,

Psalm 40:1-12,

1 Corinthians 1:1-9,

1 John 1:29-42