

January 15, 2017
2nd Sunday after Epiphany
John 1:29-42
The Rev. Carenda Baker

Can three little words change your day? Change your life? Change the world?

“Come and see”. “Come and See” was the theme of the four day-long event I attended in February, 2013 hosted by the School of Theology at the University of the South in Sewanee, TN for persons discerning where to attend seminary.

The event was designed as a brief immersion experience for inquiring and prospective students. There were opportunities to meet and talk with students currently enrolled, time to get a tour of the campus and look at housing options, to sit in on classes, to participate in daily chapel services, to have our questions answered in Q&A sessions. Most of us were housed as guests in the homes of Sewanee’s School of Theology students, which was a wonderful way to get an “insider’s” view of the Sewanee seminary experience.

I had sent in all the required application materials, and requested to have an interview with faculty while I was there. When it came time for my personal interview I met with the Dean of Students Annwyn Myers and another faculty member. Part way through the interview it became apparent to me that the other faculty member had not read the materials I had submitted, as he seemed unaware of basic details I had provided about my background. I was very disappointed when I recognized this, and somewhat angry, to be honest. The interview experience did not leave me with a favorable impression of the school.

The next day I was walking by the Dean of Students’ office, when she stopped me and asked me to come into her office. She apologized for the way my interview had gone the previous day. She said she had sensed that I was disappointed. She explained that they were short-staffed and had few available faculty members that day to sit in on interviews, so not all faculty had the opportunity to read the submitted materials in advance of meeting with prospective students. She assured me that everything I had submitted would be read and discussed by the faculty members. Whether the dean picked up on my reactions herself in the interview, or she was tipped off by the host student with whom I was staying, and to whom I had expressed disappointment, this was for me a “deal breaker” response in my decision about attending Sewanee. I was impressed by the dean’s attentiveness, and her willingness to be vulnerable and honest in telling me the truth about factors that had influenced my interview experience. “Come and See” is a catchy and effective hook phrase, and a great marketing tool, which

Sewanee continues to use in the School of Theology's exploration events. But more than a catchy theme, the dean's apology to me spoke volumes about Sewanee and the quality of experience I might expect to have if I attended there. The dean's response said to me, "We really do care about relationships here".

Two of John the Baptist's disciples listened to what John was saying about Jesus' identity, how he was the one who would baptize with the Holy Spirit, and that he was truly the Son of God. So the two set off to find Jesus. When Jesus asks the two seekers what they are looking for, they ask him ask for his address – "where are you staying?" Jesus' answer is brief and to the point. Three simple words - "*come and see*". These seekers are looking for an experience of the man Jesus himself. They want to be with him, get to know him, and maybe even follow him.

Jesus' response is both an invitation and a promise of what they can experience if they choose to respond to his call, as we read in the gospels when he says to would-be disciples, "follow me". What a wonderful thing that seekers don't have to first understand, to "have it all together" before setting out to follow him. Jesus' response - "Come and see" – brings them close to him, invites them to be in an intimate relationship, to spend time with him where he lives. The relationship with Jesus will tell them what they need to know and will transform their lives.

Imagine for a moment, that Jesus has come to us today with that same invitation to "come and see", beckoning us to spend time with him and get to know his way of life. Where do you think he might take us as we follow him?

I have a hunch Jesus would really like hanging out at the weekly Thursday morning free breakfast. Jesus was all about breaking bread with people, so I'm guessing he also would stop in to give a hand with the funeral luncheon being prepared by our members for a family whose loved one has just died. Jesus is about meeting people where they are and breaking down barriers, so we would stop in to visit the ESL (English as a second language) class, see the diversity of people gathered there. We would then make our way to Franklin County Jail to meet some prisoners, some who need to find a place to live before they can be released. We would go with Jesus to WIN (Women in Need), the shelter, and listen to the women we encounter. Jesus likely would offer some tender words of healing, hope, and love to the women and children there seeking safety, who are fleeing abusive relationships. From there we would go with him to Roxbury where folks are trying to get clean, each day facing the reality of living with an addiction. Can you hear Jesus listening to their stories, reaching out to hold a hand and telling them, "Our Father, my Abba is with you. Abba believes in you and wants you to be well. You can't get better on your own. Abba and these people will help you." From

there we would head over to the County Public Assistance Office where we would meet people waiting to see a caseworker, looking for help with housing, rent, food, health insurance and mental health care. And I'm sure we would stop at the Chambersburg Hospital and visit with some patients who are about to go into surgery. It has a calming effect just to be in Jesus' presence. We would sit with a family who has just received an unexpected and unwelcome diagnosis. A bit later we would find ourselves waiting with loved ones keeping vigil at the bedside of a family member who is dying, much like the residents at Menno Haven who volunteer to serve their fellow residents as "abiders", offering a calm and reassuring presence to them as they near death. And before we left the hospital, we would have to make a stop at the maternity ward, to gaze in wonder and give thanks for those hours old newborns who have just been delivered into the world.

And can you imagine some of the things Jesus would want to talk with us about? How much God loves us and wants to be at the center of our lives and at the center of everything we do as a community of his followers, guiding our use of time, money, gifts and talents to serve others. He would break open the Scriptures and teach us. He would share meals with us, the holy meal around God's table here in worship, and around the tables in the fellowship hall and even in our own homes. He would offer us words of caution and challenge about the things which too often hold us captive: our individualistic, consumer focused, 24/7 driven lives with no time for Sabbath rest; our seeking after success rather than focusing on growing in faithfulness. He would wonder how much we have paid attention to the prophets of our times like Martin Luther King, Jr. and Pope Francis with their calls for justice and peace. Can you imagine Jesus sitting and crying with us, praying with us for our nation and world, asking Abba to heal our divisions and enmity, bring an end to violence, open our eyes and ears to our brothers and sisters who live in poverty, fear, hopelessness, and loneliness. And then he would gather us together around him outside on the lawn, give thanks for the beauty all around, and ask for Abba to help us take care of our fragile creation and earth home.

"Come and see". Come and see, and learn from him who you were born to be. Come and see the life God intends for us, a life of promise and purpose. A life lived in community with others seeking to immerse and surround themselves with God's love, light, and healing presence.

How has your life and mine been changed by meeting Jesus? Our answer to that question is the good news we are invited to share with others, in our own simple words, extending Jesus' own invitation to "come and see".

Lutheran preaching professor David Lose said when he is teaching congregations to practice sharing the good news he invites them to turn to someone near them and share one reason they like their church, one reason they like to come. The first time he tried this, an elderly man came up to him afterward. Pastor Lose wasn't sure what to expect, because some folks definitely don't like this kind of exercise at all. But the elderly gentleman smiled, introduced Pastor Lose to his wife and said, "I want to thank you. You see, this gal and I have been going to church together for sixty years. And it turns out we've never known why the other comes!" So – friends, sometime this week, simply tell one other person why you come to Trinity. What is that you find here, what do you value?

Author Madeline L'Engle wrote: "We do not draw people to Christ by loudly discrediting what they believe, by telling them how wrong they are and how right we are, but by showing them a light that is so lovely that they want with all their hearts to know the source of it."

Come and see.

They're just three little words that will change us, and the life of our world. May it be so! Amen.