

¹In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

One hardly has to wait long these days for news reports about some big court case. Whether it's one of the cable channel talking heads telling us that Scott Peterson's third grade teacher was in the courtroom with the sniffles or a lawyer declaring how Robert Blake was simply misunderstood or some well-meaning man saying Maurice Blackwell² deserved to be shot by a twenty-something whom the former priest was accused of molesting decades ago, there's news aplenty, and plenty of witnesses—in and out of the court room—ready to offer testimony.

We rely on the testimony of witnesses—good and bad—to point us in the right direction and aid us in finding the truth. In the court room, witnesses for the prosecution and defense help the judge and jury find the way to the truth in the case. In the laboratory, scientists witness test results to lead them to the truth of a hypothesis. In the Scriptures, witnesses appear throughout the Old and New Testaments in order to lead us to the truth that is Jesus Christ.

In our Gospel this morning, there are at least seven clear examples of witness being made regarding Jesus. Of course, we have several from John the Baptist, but we also have the witness of two of John the Baptist's disciples, one of whom we know to be Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter. The witnesses point to Jesus, just as the theme of the entire Gospel points to Jesus. After all, even the Evangelist notes that “[t]hese are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.”³ In the gospel according to John, witnesses are just one of the many signs that point the reader or listener toward Jesus Christ, who points to the Lord God.

John the Baptist, of course, was never shy about public declarations of faith. Throughout the gospels John is clearly a preacher and proclaimer. Here, John bears witness that Jesus is the Lamb of God, takes away the sins of the world, existed before John was born, has the Spirit resting upon him and, unlike the other gospel

¹ In the ELCA's *Renewing Worship* project, the Sundays after Epiphany and Pentecost are identified as “The x Sunday, Time after Epiphany/Pentecost.” No, I don't know why we had to choose something other than what was used by most of the rest of Christendom.

² For non-Baltimore area readers, Maurice Blackwell, a former Roman Catholic priest, was charged with molesting a young man many years ago. Prior to Blackwell's initial trial date, the young man shot and injured Blackwell. The young man was acquitted of charges related to the shooting.

³ [John 20:31](#) (NRSV)

accounts, John witnesses that Jesus is the Son of God. John the Baptist, sent to prepare the way for the Messiah, wants to make it as clear and simple and obvious for people as possible for whom he is preparing the way. The signs are so bright and clear that the highway department could learn some lessons about marking things.

With very few exceptions, the Bible shows us that it takes a witness to point out Jesus to those who have not yet met him. For example, Andrew and another of John's disciples are made aware of Jesus by the Baptizer himself, then Andrew goes and tells Simon Peter. While Philip is called by Jesus himself without another serving as witness, Philip is the witness to Nathanael, who then comes along to see for himself. New followers of Jesus become followers because someone else says to them, "Come and see."

Notice the pattern of witnessing Jesus Christ to others. The witness declares clearly what he has observed and come to know, and then extends the simple invitation to *come and see* to another person. John didn't enter into a lengthy theological discourse about the human and divine natures of Jesus, or explain how Lutherans didn't accept the doctrine of transubstantiation, or print up a fancy bulletin with all the worship parts clearly marked. John simply told people what he saw and believed. Andrew hears John's invitation to come and see, and then, after seeing, goes to his brother and says, "Hey, we've found the Messiah! Come and see for yourself, too!"

The invitation to come into fellowship with our Lord Jesus Christ is simple and, frankly, non-threatening. After all, how threatening can it be to say, "Come and see" to someone? The person being invited is not being asked to come and pay a lot of money, or come and give up all of her possessions, or come and try strange foods from foreign lands. Even Andrew and Simon Peter weren't told, "Come and follow me right now," but "Come and see," from which the Holy Spirit was allowed to do what the Holy Spirit does best.

Bringing new people to come and experience Jesus and what Jesus has to offer is as simple as saying, "Come and see." "Come and see what goes on at my church on Sunday morning." "Come and see what we do at Abiding Presence on Saturday mornings once a month." "Come and see what crazy thing our pastor is going to do on Monday nights starting in February."

Being a witness to Jesus Christ does not require doing anything more risky than saying “Come and see” to someone. The invitation to know Jesus Christ doesn’t require a master of divinity in order to extend it. The invitation to experience fellowship with others searching for answers to the challenges of life does not require in-depth understanding of the Augsburg Confession, the Smalkald Articles, or how to spell Melanchthon in order to extend it.

Time and again we see the example of being a witness set before us. Tell folks what you see and what you believe. Then, when they ask for more, simply tell them “Come and see.” Every one of us can look at an action or event and see different things in the exact same event. So, when we have the opportunity to allow folks to see for themselves, rather than relying on our description.

So then, what are we to take from the gospel this morning once we leave here and go back out into the big, bad secular world on Monday morning? That we are to tell folks about the glorious gift of salvation that comes to us through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ? That by the grace of God through faith we are justified, and not by our works? That we are children of God by our baptism with water and the Holy Spirit? That we stand around this table and receive bread and wine that are the real and true Body and Blood of Christ?

No. We are to do none of these things.

Rather, we are to say to someone who is not here today “Come and see.” When we do this, we are doing what we are called upon to do in a way that the youngest one in our midst can do as well as the oldest or most educated.

I want you to all to be able to leave here today and say that you actually learned something. So, repeat after me: “Come and see.” Great! You have learned all that you need to know to be a witness to Jesus Christ. Now, practice saying it this week until it becomes second nature!