

Hy 12:1,2
Hy 11:1,2
Ps 66:2,7,8
Ps 46:4,5
Hy 52:1,2,3
John 1:29-42
Psalm 46
I John 1:1-4
Jn 1:39a "Come," He replied, "and you will see."

Yarrow, December 13, 2009

Beloved Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ!

Some things in life are very obvious because they stare us in the face. That includes not just the very physical things we see and hear and smell day by day, but also the very real pain and struggles of our hearts. The brokenness of life and the struggles that follow: not everybody can see it, but we sure all experience it, feel it.

Christmas is around the corner, that time of year when our thoughts are directed more than usual to the birth of Jesus Christ and to the promise of peace on earth that came through His coming. It's a message we appreciate, and so a season we enjoy. But truth be said, the message of peace on earth doesn't feel as real as the pain that sits in our hearts; somehow the pain and the brokenness is louder, more in-our-face, than the peace of Christ's coming. It strikes us that *seeing* Christ would certainly help us in coping with life's hurt; seeing Him and His peace would at least make the gospel as real and as obvious as the pain....

Now we read in our text of Jesus' invitation to two followers to come and see. And we're a bit jealous. *We'd* love to see Jesus Christ, *see* the reality of what He's done. But we're sure we can't; He lived so long ago....

Actually, we're wrong on that. For yes, we too are invited to come and see for ourselves, see what God has done and is doing for you in Jesus Christ. I summarize the sermon with this theme:

OBSERVE FOR YOURSELF WHAT GOD IS DOING IN JESUS CHRIST.

1. The setting of Jesus' invitation
2. The meaning of Jesus' invitation
3. The lesson of Jesus' invitation

1. The setting of Jesus' invitation

The passage we read from John 1 tells us of three men walking along the banks of the River Jordan. One walked on ahead; the other two were shadowing the first, going wherever the first went. The first of the three is Jesus of Nazareth; the other two are two disciples of John the Baptist. The one is identified as Andrew and the other – well, we're not told, but in all likelihood is John, the author of this gospel.

We don't know how long they walked, the one up front, the other two following. At a given moment, the one up front turned around to address the two following Him. He asked the logical question: "what do you want?" In other words: why are you following Me? That question in turn prompts the two to give this answer: "Rabbi," they say, "where are you staying?" To which Jesus responded with the simple words of our text: "Come and you will see." Thereupon the three walk on, Jesus leading the way, the two following to see the place where Jesus was lodging.

"Come and you will see," said Jesus to the two disciples. The words are simple enough. Yet, brothers and sisters, there is more in these simple and straightforward words of the Saviour than that

the disciples should literally follow and see for themselves where Jesus was staying. I say that there is more to these words than the obvious, simple, literal meaning because –note it– John saw fit to repeat these same words two more times in this chapter. Jesus’ invitation to “come and see” are echoed in the words immediately following our text, where we are told that the two disciples “went and saw”. And they appear again in the instruction of Philip to Nathanael in vs 46: “Come and see.” John’s emphasis on these little words “come and see” compel us to consider what Jesus really meant with His invitation to the two disciples following Him.

The short conversation between Jesus on the one hand and the two men on the other was prompted by the fact that the two had been following Jesus. That’s vs 38: “Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, ‘What do you want?’”

The reason for their following is given in vs 35-37. John the Baptist had been standing somewhere along the Jordan River, being about his business with a couple of his disciples accompanying him. Jesus walked past, John pointed at Him and said: “Behold the Lamb of God.”

This was not the first time that John had spoken thus of this Jesus. Just one day earlier John had seen Jesus coming to him, and had uttered the same words: “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (vs 29). At that time John had gone on to identify his own relation to Jesus; said John yesterday: “this is He of whom I said, ‘After me comes a Man who is preferred before me’” (vs 30). And John had gone on to tell about Jesus’ baptism. Said the Baptist: “I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him” (vs 32). So John could come to his conclusion: “this is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world” (vs 29).

When Jesus on the next day again walked past John, the Baptist again identified Jesus for his disciples. Says John a second time: “Behold, the Lamb of God” (vs 36). This was then instruction for John’s disciples, instruction about that man walking over there. It was instruction John’s disciples could understand, for the phrase “lamb of God” was known to them from the Old Testament. You remember: in the sacrificial system the Lord had ordained for Israel around the tabernacle, the people were repeatedly to bring sacrifices for sin (Leviticus 4). The people ought to die on account of their sins (Genesis 2:17), but the Lord would let an animal die in their place. Specifically in the Passover celebration, the animal that was to be slaughtered for sin had to be a lamb (Ex 12:3ff). Yet the animal could never atone for the sin; it was slaughtered in place of the sinner as instruction to the sinner that Another who would one day come to pay for sin (cf Isaiah 53:7. And Old Testament Scripture made clear that this Other who would pay for sin would come from God; God Himself would provide the Lamb who was to take sin away (cf Genesis 22:8).

Well now, John saw Jesus of Nazareth walking past, the Man Whom he had baptized, the Man on whom the Holy Spirit had come. Prophet that he was, John now proclaimed to his disciples the identity of this Jesus of Nazareth; “Behold!” said he, “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” By so saying, John announced to his disciples the *fulfillment of the Old Testament Scriptures concerning the Lamb*; here, he says, is the One prophesied in the Old Testament. Says John to his disciples: through this Man, God is working forgiveness of sins, is bringing complete redemption; this One will conclusively reconcile sinners to God. “Behold the Lamb of God!”

John’s disciples were normal men, people like you and me who suffered daily the painful consequences of our fall into sin in Paradise. The headaches and the heartaches that characterize this broken life filled their homes and lives also. That here was now a man who would atone for sin and take away the bitter effects of sin demanded but one conclusion: Follow Him, find out who He is! So the two left their teacher standing where he was, and followed this Lamb of God as He continued His walk along the river.

Jesus was true God, knew what His herald John had said to the two disciples concerning Him, knew that the two disciples had left their teacher to follow Him. In that context, Jesus turned, saw his two shadows, and asked His question: “what do you want?”

The answer of the two disciples is this: “Rabbi, where are You staying?” They use the word ‘Rabbi’, an Aramaic word to which John directs our attention, for he translates it for us; ‘rabbi’ means ‘teacher’. As it turns out, the word ‘rabbi’ means literally ‘my great one’. The person who calls another ‘Rabbi’ expresses with that term that the other is higher in rank than he himself is.¹ By using this title, then, the two disciples indicated to Jesus that they understood the teaching of John the Baptist, understood that Jesus ranked highly, was “preferred before” John. They esteem Jesus (the stranger whom John had called “the Lamb of God”), and that’s why they follow Him. They esteem this Lamb of God, and so want to be taught by Him; they call Him by the title pupils commonly gave to their teacher.² They want to be taught, want to get to know this ‘Lamb of God’, and so want to know too where Jesus is staying. They want to spend time with Jesus, talk with Him, learn from Him, and so they follow Him, looking for opportunity to sit down and talk. “What do you want?” Jesus asks them, and they tell Him: ‘we believe that You are the Lamb of God, and so understand that we need to learn much from you, and so we want to know where you lodge so that we can sit down with You for a talk.’ That’s their answer. And in the face of that response, we read the words of our text: “He said to them, ‘Come and see.’”

That, then, tells us of the setting of Jesus’ invitation. At Jesus’ first encounter with these two men, while the two men themselves know and believe that Jesus is the “Lamb of God”, Jesus invites the two to “come and see”.

2. The meaning of Jesus’ invitation

“Come and you will see,” invited Jesus. John tells us of the response of the two disciples to this invitation: “they came and saw.”

It is true that these words strike us as so simple and straightforward. Please remember, though, brothers and sisters, that these two disciples believe Jesus to be the “Lamb of God” and so they want instruction from Him; there is a reason why they call Jesus “‘Rabbi’ (which is to say, when translated, Teacher).” But –remarkably– we get to hear nothing of the instruction they received in Jesus’ house. We’re only told that they “remained with Him that day” (and they got there around the tenth hour, vs 39b – which appears to be about four in the afternoon, and so could talk all evening long). Why is it that we don’t get to hear the conversation between them and Jesus in Jesus’ home??

Here, brothers and sisters, I come back to what I said earlier about the emphasis John lays on the words “Come and you will see.” The fact is that those little words are themselves a quote from the Old Testament Scriptures. Jesus, Rabbi (=Teacher) that He is, directs them to Scripture to make them see for themselves what God in heaven is busy doing in Jesus of Nazareth.

How so? The words ‘Come and see’ echo in particular two psalms, Ps 46 & Ps 66.³ We read Ps 46 together. Vs 8 extends the invitation (as rendered in our translation) to “come and see the works of the LORD.” Here’s an invitation to come along to see what there is to see, to leave the spot where you now are in order to check out for yourself what God has done. The background of Ps 46 cannot be determined with certainty, but respected commentators suggest that the psalm was written in response to the slaughter of the Assyrian forces by the angel of the Lord after the Assyrians had besieged Jerusalem in the days of Hezekiah (Is 36f).⁴ Be that as it may (and we’ll assume these commentators are correct), the point is that God had worked “desolations ... on the earth,” and the evidence lay outside

¹Lohse, *TDNT*, VI, pg 961: “the one called ‘Rabbi’ is recognized thereby to be higher in rank than the speaker.”

²Ibid, 962.

³See C vanderWaal, *De Vervulde Thorah* (Kampen: vandenBerg, 1984), pg 66.

⁴See HC Leupold, *Exposition of Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1969), pg 362; F vanDeursen, *Psalmen I* (Barendrecht: Drukkerij Liebeek & Hooijmeijer, 1978), pg 336. So also Calvin, *Commentary on the Psalms*.

for all to see. One need but get out of one's house, climb the city wall, and look onto the fields around Jerusalem to see very physical and tangible evidence of "the works of the Lord". It was all laying there on the plains below: the bow and the spear were broken, the shields (or chariots; see footnote) were burned with fire, the war had been made to cease (vss 8ff) – the evidence lay concretely before your eyes. You could see it – and could appreciate it only if you first believed that this was *God's* work.

What the implication was of coming to see God's mighty deeds on the plains below? This: *God isn't just a vague someone in the sky, and faith in God isn't just a good feeling*. The people in Jerusalem had been stressed so cruelly by the terrifying Assyrians as their grip on the city had tightened with the passing weeks (talk about obvious pain!), but God had provided concrete relief. God was real, God was there; God was real *for me*, God was there for the *individual* resident of Jerusalem. So each person could confess in Ps 46 is own personal faith: "God is our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble" (vs 1) and "the Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge" (vs 7, 11). These were statements rooted in the very physical and visible evidence of God's mighty deeds; this God worked a victory that all could see, all could experience – and as a result sleep much more securely. "Come, behold the works of the Lord": and we can imagine that the people of Jerusalem were more than happy to climb up the walls of the city to see with their own eyes the victory that their God had worked.

As to the second psalm in which that instruction to "come and see" appears –Ps 66– the same sort of things can be said. That is: God's mighty deeds of deliverance, and the consequences flowing from them, are apparent for the eye to see. One can "come and see", can get up and check out the claims made about the Lord God. This God has acted in history, acted in very real and verifiable and tangible ways. That's the point of the call in those two psalms to "come and see".

There stands now Jesus of Nazareth telling His two followers to "come and you will see". Given the background of those words in Ps 46 & Ps 66, what "work of God" must these two disciples come to see? Jesus is the "Lamb of God," John the Baptist had said. That is: God Himself had given Jesus of Nazareth as the Lamb to the people, given Him for slaughter so that through Him atonement might be made for sins, sinners delivered from slavery to sin and Satan, be reconciled to God. In this Lamb, God Himself would fulfill all the sacrifices and ceremonies of the Law, and the result would be that sinners are set free, can enter again into the presence of God Himself. In a word: here is a deliverance more radical, more glorious, more lasting, than the deliverance behind Ps 46! More, the deliverance behind Ps 46 is a foreshadowing of this glorious deliverance! That sin would be paid for, Satan be defeated, the people of God set free from bondage to sin and the devil: talk about a wonderful work that God would do! The disciples may know Jesus to be the Lamb of God, and so they are invited to come with Jesus, not just today but all the time, so that they might *see for themselves* the awesome work which God was doing in the Christ!

No, we don't get to hear the conversation Jesus had with these two disciples once the three of them arrived at Jesus' place. "They came and saw where He was staying, and remained with Him that day," and they talked enough for Andrew to say to brother Simon afterward: "We have found the Messiah" (vs 41). They talked, and as a result of the conversation these two disciples "saw", came to recognize that in Jesus of Nazareth God was doing a mighty work of salvation. They "came and saw" what God was doing, and so believed that Jesus was the Christ.

And in time to come they continued to follow Jesus around, to "see" what God was doing in Jesus of Nazareth. For three years Andrew and his companion "saw" with their own eyes God's work in Jesus Christ. They saw it: the sick were healed, demons were cast out, the dead were raised, persons bound by sin delivered from their bondage. More, they saw this "Lamb of God" sacrificed for sin on the cursed cross, heard Jesus cry out too that all was finished (Jn 19:31), saw that He died in triumph, was buried, saw that He arose from the dead in majesty. They "came and saw", saw so much – and wrote it

down for our comfort. Says John himself in his first letter –and notice the repetition of the word “seen”– says John himself in his first letter:

“That which was from the beginning, ...which *we have seen with our eyes*, which we have *looked upon*, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life— the life was manifested, and *we have seen, and bear witness*, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us— that which we have *seen* and heard we declare to you....that your joy may be full” (1 John 1:1-4).

John “came and saw” the works of God in Jesus Christ, saw with his own eyes that the “Lamb of God” indeed paid for sin – and so he rejoiced. He’s told us of what he saw, so that in turn our joy may also be full.

3. The lesson of Jesus’ invitation

What is it now, beloved, that we learn from the invitation of Jesus to the two disciples to “come and see”? We learn this: God’s work does not float in the sky, is not unattached from the realities of this life. God does His work, and *people in the pain of this life can see it*. God worked a very concrete deliverance in the days of Ps 46, a work so real and concrete that the people of Jerusalem could go see with their own eyes what God had done for them. God in Christ worked a very real deliverance in the days of Andrew and John, worked so concretely that with their own eyes they could see what this work of God was all about; they could see it and rejoice.

And we? No, we can’t climb the walls of Yarrow to see the enemy defeated outside. And we can’t follow Jesus of Nazareth in the literal, physical manner as Andrew and John did and watch Him cast out demons, raise the dead and do other miracles that prophesy the destruction of the effects of our sins. Yet God would have us too to “come and see”, to “come and see” the awesome works He is doing today. What awesome work, you ask, is He doing today? This: Christ’s work of salvation, gained so long ago, is today applied to God’s people so that persons by nature dead in sin are made to believe. And this: God’s preserving work is applied today so that you and I are made to persevere in the faith God has worked in our hearts. You see: God’s work was not limited to the days of Ps 46 or the days of Jesus’ sojourn on earth – as if today the matter of religion is academic, God but a distant Being far removed from our lives and experiences today. No, today God works, today God applies to sinful hearts the salvation He worked in Christ long ago. Today God works, works concretely, works in such a way that *you* can see it, experience it.

So, my beloved, the invitation of Ps 46 remains as real for you today as it was for those first hearers of the psalm so long ago. You too, like Andrew and John, are invited to “come and see” the works of God, to see *in your own life* God’s triumph in Christ Jesus over sin and darkness. More: the chosen, the believing, *can* see, for God was pleased to open the eyes of the spiritually blind so that we can see for ourselves what He has done in our hearts and lives. That recreating, regenerating work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of sinners remains concrete evidence that, Yes, *God is at work in us*. Once more: the chosen, the believing, *will* see, for God’s work cannot but be noticed, seen, observed. It is not possible to believe in God, be regenerated by His Spirit, and yet not notice, see God’s very real work in your own heart and life. The command of Scripture to “come and see” is not an invitation given to the blind; God opens the eyes of His people so that we really can see His work in our lives.

That in turn means, my brothers and sisters, that it is for all of us –children of God as we claim to be– to “come and see” the awesome deeds God has done through Jesus Christ for us, to us, in us. To see that work of God in our lives will fill the heart of the believing sinner with deepest thankfulness, joy, humility; it gives cause for the peace and security and joy of Ps 46 and of I John 1 to settle and grow in our hearts.⁵

⁵See Canons of Dort, V, 7,10.

Yes, we'd love to see God, see the Christ once born in Bethlehem, see the truth of forgiveness of sins, of life eternal. Your God, congregation, would have you see – No, not Him (not yet!), but His work. Let that be enough. Believe in Him, and then see for yourself the evidence that His Word is sure.

And the day comes soon that you will see Him face to face. Then the pain that's now so dominant will be no more... – for what we see in Christ will be our everything.