

Epiphany 2, Year A, 011914
All Saints Episcopal Church

*Jesus calls us; o'er the tumult of our life's wild, restless sea,
Day by day his clear voice soundeth, saying, "Christian, follow me;"*

In the name of God, creator, redeemer, and sustainer. Amen.

Today's Gospel is John's account of the baptism of Jesus. I know - we just read that last week; why are we doing it again? Well, good question. The two baptism stories - John's - and Matthew's (the one we heard last week) - are very different from each other. In addition, John's gospel has a second story that is pretty different from the equivalent stories in the other three gospels.

The most obvious difference between the baptism stories is that Matthew's version focuses on a John the Baptist who has an overwhelming sense of being unfit to do the job he has been called to do. "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"

But in the Gospel of John, there is no such feeling of unworthiness. In fact, the character John is never even called 'the Baptist' at all in that Gospel. His role, instead, is one of being a witness, not the baptizer. The Father and the Spirit take care of baptizing Jesus; John points and says, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." He is an eyewitness, someone who can and does make a public statement about his belief.

*As, of old, Saint Andrew heard it by the Galilean lake, turned from home and toil
and kindred, leaving all for his dear sake.*

There's a difference sometimes between seeing and REALLY seeing. We can look at someone or something, but if we aren't really paying attention we don't really see the person. So if we really want to see and know someone, we must look, we must see inside the person, we must look into his eyes, we must really look in order to know her heart. John the Witness sees the truth of Jesus and points the way to him. He points so earnestly and sincerely, that the day after Jesus' baptism, two of John's disciples see Jesus walking by and decide that they will follow him -- at a distance.

Jesus notices that they are following him. He stops and asks them, "What are you looking for?" and they, in turn, can only come up with, "Where are you staying?" Maybe they were embarrassed that they'd been caught following him. Maybe they were just trying to fill an awkward silence. Maybe they didn't know what they were looking for. But Jesus seems to know: "Come and see," he says. And they stayed with him all day.

The two disciples must have liked what they saw. Because late in the afternoon, one of them, named Andrew, ran to find his brother Simon and tell him that they had found the Messiah. Andrew took Simon to meet Jesus, and Jesus gave Simon a new name, Peter. Encountering the holy in Jesus has changed Simon. In meeting Jesus, Simon has found his true self.

Jesus continues to say, "Come and see," as he calls more disciples. And he tells those who come to hear what he has to say, that they will see many signs and wonders.

Come and See. That seems to be what this story is really about. A person, John, who had experienced the power of Jesus, shared with his friends what it meant to him. They, in turn, were invited to "come and see," that is to say, to come and experience Jesus for themselves. After spending the afternoon with him, Andrew finds his brother, Simon, tells him about Jesus, and the cycle begins again.

Come and see. That's the gospel right there. An invitation not just to follow, but to see. John calls them to look and Jesus asks them to see. You can picture this moment, Jesus quietly, gently speaking, then turning again and walking away, ready for their companionship, open to whatever choice they will make. And these new disciples do follow and they do see for themselves. They see that this teacher, this Lamb of God, is something wholly new. Holy and new.

Come and see. What is true for Simon - finding his true self by seeking the Messiah, is also true for us. We are a world full of seekers. We Americans have "the pursuit of happiness" written into our history and our cultural DNA.

People all over the world look and seek and scramble for that which will bring meaning to their lives. It has been said that there is a hole in the heart of

humanity that only God can fill. As Saint Augustine put it in a prayer, "Our hearts are restless, O Lord, until they rest in thee."

And so many of us go restlessly through life, looking here and there and everywhere, looking for the thing that will fill that hole in our heart, not knowing that that the thing that we seek is also actively seeking us.

To find and be found, we all need a John the Baptist, an Andrew, a preacher, a teacher, a friend, a brother or sister; maybe all of the above and more - to point us in the right direction and to keep us on the way.

Then when we find and are found, we will be changed, transformed, renamed in recognition of the fact that our true nature has been revealed - not only to us but to the world. Our name is unlikely to be Cephas; it is more probable that it will be something like Beloved, Forgiven, Full of Grace, Full of Joy, Child of God, etc.

So we will arise from our encounter with the holy; we will get up from having had our name changed and we will go forth into the world to be pointers and proclaimers ourselves. Our faith will grow as we follow the invitation to 'come and see' over and over again.

It will grow as we see kindness offered and learn a way to offer it ourselves. It will grow as we gratefully receive the generous gifts of others and learn to share, in turn, from what we have been given. It will grow as we are prayed for and learn to pray for others. It will grow as we experience forgiveness and learn to seek reconciliation where things are broken between us. It will grow as we hear the call for justice and learn to join others in working for it.

This is not difficult, it is not something to worry about or shy away from - all that is required is a willingness to help others find what you have found. To invite them to come and see; to find.....and to be found.

Jesus calls us! By thy mercies, Savior, may we hear thy call, give our hearts to thine obedience, serve and love thee best of all.