

Come and See

This past weekend I saw part of a documentary about the January 6 insurrection.

One of the things that the mob carried was a poster of Jesus, wearing a MAGA hat.

The very next morning, a relative whom I love dearly sent me a text which attached Tucker Carlson's latest video, claiming that the whole insurrection, and the investigation that followed, is nothing more than a sham and a lie.

And I could only shake my head at the willful blindness that leads to this kind of thinking.

But in the midst of shaking my head, it occurred to me that this blindness isn't limited to one particular political or social group.

Willful blindness seems to be a human predicament.

I have plenty of it myself.

On those rare occasions when I get really honest with myself, I notice how easily I can and do often dismiss individuals, groups, even entire nations, as irrelevant and insignificant.

It takes great effort on my part to actually see those things which I so easily simply size up, then, judge and dismiss.

Perhaps some of you can relate.

And perhaps that's what is happening when Jesus encounters Andrew this morning, as Jesus invites Andrew to "come and see."

For isn't that the entire point of the season that we are in, this season of Epiphany?

A season when God invites all of us to come and see that which is really real.

To take off the blinders that keep us so blind.

While Jesus healed many who were physically blind, the greatest miracle is when he restores sight to those who are spiritually blind.

When those who once saw God in terms of power, wealth and control are given the grace to see God in the least, the lost and the left behind.

That, it seems to me, is the heart and soul of our faith.

Come and see.

"Come," is an invitation to get off of our couches, to get out from in front of our television sets, to enter into the world where this dangerous God is on the move.

Dangerous because God takes all we think we know and turns it upside down and inside out.

The invitation to "come" tells us that our faith is not so much about personal piety as it is about engaging with each other on this good earth, during this good life, with all of its pain and misery and disappointments.

The invitation to "come" is an invitation to move outside of myself, and into the myriad worlds that you occupy.

It's an invitation to take off my blinders, and to begin to see the world as perhaps God sees it.

So the invitation to "come" is an invitation to action.

To put flesh on the bones of our faith.

When we accept that invitation, why, that's when we are finally able to see.

An example.

Cathy, our senior warden, arrives every Saturday at the breakfast.

She's been taking photos of our guests, mostly close-ups, always with their permission.

Mostly she takes headshots.

Mind you, this is a population that is invisible to most in our community.

And on the rare occasions when they are seen, they are, almost invariably, immediately dismissed.

But spend a moment looking at Cathy's photos and you may be moved to tears.

For in those simple portraits you might see a quiet dignity, a long suffering, and the pure human resilience that pours itself out in every human life.

Especially in the lives of the houseless.

Especially in the lives of the invisible.

It can be a sight, and an insight, that is overwhelming.

Come and see.

This week your clergy were all on retreat at Camp Mokuleia.

The guest speaker was a Holy Cross Father.

His monastery is in New York and they follow the Rule of St Benedict.

And the topic of his conversation with us was a wonderful one.

It began with a look at those times in our lives when all seems lost, or when important relationships are ruptured and try as we might, we can't fix them.

Or when the dreaded word "cancer" is announced, and it's in me.

Or when a job is suddenly lost or a friend suddenly dies.

So often at these times it seems that God has gone missing.

St John of the Cross spoke of these times as a dark night of the soul.

Mother Theresa lived with this kind of darkness for decades according to her diaries.

There are precious few of us who escape these kinds of times in our lives.

But what the speaker asked us to consider is that even though these times seem to be times when God has taken a hike, or perhaps we blame ourselves for an inadequate prayer life or believe we're being punished for some real or perceived misdeed, in fact, something entirely different is going on.

In fact, it is precisely in these darkest times when the God of Jesus Christ is most present.

Rabbi Harold Kushner spent many years ruminating about just such things.

He wrote a book you may know: "Why Do Bad Things Happen To Good People?"

He wrote that book after his teenage son died of congestive heart failure.

But as he aged, Rabbi Kushner wrote another book.

This one about the suffering, and the meaning of that suffering, of Job.

He says:

"I now find God not in the perfection of the world, the intricacies of rain and sun, growth and healing, the change of seasons and the beauty of the leaves in autumn.

I find God in the miracle of human resilience in the face of the world's imperfections, even the world's cruelty.

How are people able to survive tragedy?

(And that is what you do with tragedy).

You don't understand or explain it, you survive it.

What gave survivors of the Holocaust the courage to remarry and create new families after what the Nazis and their collaborators did to their first families?

What enabled our fourteen-year-old son, so stricken with congestive heart failure that he had to sleep standing up to look forward to every day he had to share with his friends, his family, and his dog?

What motivates doctors to search for cures, and neighbors to hug us and dry our tears when we are stricken, if it is not God at work within them — and within us?

Like Job, I have met God.

I have met Him in the sunshine — but more often in the shadows.

Not in the elegant perfection of the world — but in the resilience of the human soul.

In the ability of people to find even a pain-filled life, even a grossly unfair life, worth living.

I have met God in the readiness of people to reach out to the afflicted, to salve their wounds, not with doctrines, but with hugs and with tears." H. Kushner, *The Book of Job*, modified.

Come and see.

The life Jesus invites us into is not what we thought.

We thought of a life that if we minded our p's and q's, God will reward us with happiness, financial success and a joyful family life.

God doesn't want us to settle for such a superficial life.

No, the God of the depths invites us into the depths.

And to get there requires a life filled with loving and letting go.

A life centered on surrender.

A life that comes to see that the more I am filled with myself, the less room I have to be filled with God.

Thus, the painful journey of learning how to let go of myself - so that Gods-self may find its way in.

And lo and behold, when I undergo that journey, when I make room for Gods-self in place of myself, what I discover is something I knew all along - but somehow forgot.

Gods-self IS my true self.

And with that, the Kingdom of God opens wide.

Come and see.

+amen

