

Come and see

John 1: 1-5 and 43-46

[Augsburg University Chapel, January 19, 2021, Epiphany 2]

¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴ in him was life, [\[a\]](#) and the life was the light of all people. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

⁴³ The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." ⁴⁴ Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. ⁴⁵ Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth." ⁴⁶ Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see."

A change is gonna come (Sam Cooke)

I was born by the river, in a little tent
Oh, and just like the river
I've been running ever since

It's been a long
A long time coming
But I know a change gonna come
Oh, yes it will

It's been too hard living
But I'm afraid to die
'Cause I don't know what's up there
Beyond the sky

It's been a long
A long time coming
But I know a change gonna come
Oh, yes it will

I go to the movie
And I go downtown
Somebody keep telling me
Don't hang around

It's been a long
A long time coming
But I know, a change gonna come
Oh, yes it will

Then I go to my brother
And I say, brother, help me please
But he winds up, knockin' me
Back down on my knees

Oh, there been times that I thought
I couldn't last for long
But now I think I'm able, to carry on

It's been a long
A long time coming
But I know a change gonna come
Oh, yes it will

Last week, Pastor Babette introduced us to the iconic Sam Cooke ballad that provides the theme for this semester's chapel services and then she offered a powerful word about the call to watch for and be "the change that gonna come." As I reflected on her challenge, I was struck by how the liturgical season of Epiphany, the time between Christmas and Ash Wednesday, offers us a rich reservoir of language and concepts to embrace this change that is coming.

The 20th century theologian Paul Tillich once said that the opposite of faith is not doubt; it is certainty. I think of this point often during Epiphany, when we celebrate the light that has come into the world, and Christians everywhere are tempted to believe that all is well, certain even that the dark will no longer prevail. God has broken into our lives and now the entire world will see that we have found the way, the truth, the life...

And then I pause and consider the power of the darkness all around us. Especially in these fraught times, we witness the darkness of violence, of bias and injustice, of illness and death, of hunger and pain and indifference. Where is the light that overcomes this darkness? If all is well (as we would like to believe), then what are we to do with the evidence that contradicts our certainty?

In her provocative book, *Learning to Walk in the Darkness*, theologian Barbara Brown Taylor addresses this tension of a world divided into light and dark. She writes: "...I have learned things in the dark that I could have never learned in the light, things that saved my life over and over again, so that there is only one logical conclusion: I need darkness as much as I need light." Her theological point is that we cannot afford to divide the world simply into light and dark, or good and evil, and believe naively that God is only in the light, while all else is left to the shadows of our lives. Instead, we must embrace the reality that we live as those called into the light while residing in a world marked by darkness. How will we learn to walk in the darkness?

Our two readings from the first chapter of John's gospel illustrate this dynamic tension. On the one hand, we have these soaring words from the opening stanza: "In the beginning was the Word – What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of the world. The Light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it."

And then just a few verses later, we are on the ground with Jesus in the early days of his ministry, calling his disciples to follow him. First, it is Andrew and then Simon Peter. And then we join the story with Philip and Nathanael. And it is Nathanael who helps set the

terms of our tension when he asks of Philip, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” to which Philip responds, “Come and see.”

Similarly, in Sam Cooke’s ballad, we hear his proclamation that “change is gonna come” interspersed with stanzas like this: “Then I go to my brother, And I say, brother, help me please, But he winds up knockin’ me, Back down on my knees.”

You are the light of the world, but the world is marked by darkness. Change is gonna come, but there is so much that needs to be changed. How shall we go forward? Come and see...

It seems to me that these questions about how to live as children of the light in the midst of the darkness, about how to follow the call to discipleship, are at the heart of our common work as God’s faithful people. And together, we are called to explore our individual and common callings to be God’s people and do God’s work in the world. But it’s sometimes hard to know what to do, what to expect, how to be faithful when there are so many obstacles and temptations to decline the invitation of faith, to step off the path of discipleship.

And so I offer these Epiphany notes from the field about what it means to receive and accept the invitation to come and see...

Come and see...the gift of surprise. I love the quintessential Epiphany story of the wise men and its emblematic lessons for what it means to fall in love with God (again), to be drawn by something as compelling as a sacred star, out of our positions of power and privilege, on journeys of risk and adventure, finally to reach our destination and to find this remarkable surprise, this counter-intuitive God, this child in his mother’s arms. And then to offer our rare gifts, to worship, to return home by another route, to be changed forever.

I think about the logic of this love story especially this week, when we consider Martin Luther King, Jr., whose life and work we honored on Monday, and the journey that he undertook and the surprises he encountered along the way - often, unwelcome surprises - and how his vocation unfolded on unexpected and life-changing ways. Instead of the scholar’s life or the prestigious pulpit, Dr. King was drawn by a dream to make a journey, to encounter the surprises of a life of discipleship, and to give everything to follow the call. Come and see...

Come and see...the call to be neighbor. In these pandemic times, it has sometimes been hard to know how to be neighbors when we are forced to stay away from each other. But I have been inspired by so many of our staff and faculty and students who have redoubled their efforts to walk alongside our neighbors and to follow the path of discipleship to a God who calls us to feed the hungry, free the oppressed, heal the sick, and fight for justice – the way, the truth, the life.

If you haven’t noticed, check out the Shop Local campaign, spearheaded by our Sabo Center for Democracy and Citizenship, that is supporting local businesses. Or look again – and maybe volunteer – at the Campus Kitchen, which is meeting the needs of our neighbors

who are food insecure, on and off campus. See how the Minnesota Urban Debate League has moved its programs online so that middle and high school students across the metro area can continue to participate in debate programs that equip them for success in college and beyond. Witness the work of our Health Commons in downtown Minneapolis and here in Cedar-Riverside, offering food and water and comfort and kindness to those so in need

Our students and co-workers and fellow faithful may most fully discern their calls as they are inspired and nurtured to make a difference in the lives of our neighbors, to be of service of the world, to be God's hands and the face of Christ to our fellow travelers. Surely Peter and Philip and Nathanael didn't know exactly what was going on when Jesus called and named them, but they followed and served. You shall be my disciples, Jesus said, and through you shall my people find their way in the world...come and see.

Come and see...the promise of abundance - I would venture that the most significant challenge we all face in being faithful and following our calls is the fact that we live in a world marked by a perspective of scarcity. And to my mind, the scarcity we experience is too often a result of wanting answers here and now, of fearing the dark, the unknown and surprising, of not being able to deal with the messiness of the called life.

Consider again our gospel for this morning. If we want firm answers, this is not the place to look. But if we are willing to accept the invitation to abundance, the invitation to be loved and claimed, the invitation to follow our Lord, then here is our call.

I learned a great deal about abundance from my friend and faculty colleague, Jay Walljasper, who tragically passed away just before Christmas. Jay was a renaissance person – a journalist, an activist, a believer in what we all share in common. In our teaching together, we explored with our students the wonders of cities, places that mattered. Time and again, Jay would share his passion for the ordinary ways in which cities are places of abundance. Jay liked to quote Mexican novelist, Carlos Fuentes, who says “The citizen takes his city for granted far too often. He (and she) forgets to marvel.”

Jay Walljasper never forgot to marvel, and in his marveling he taught all of us to believe in the promise of abundance! Rest in abundant power, Jay!

Change is gonna come – indeed, it is happening in our midst. Come and see, come and see..

Thanks be to God. Amen.