

I am technologically challenged. Just ask my husband. I am challenged when operating the TV remote and trying to access various streaming services; I am challenged when trying to show a DVD or connect my computer to the large TV in the Fellowship Hall; and I am challenged when something happens to my computer. While technological understanding comes very naturally to some (my husband for example), I always find myself befuddled and cannot seem to make sense of what needs to be done. I have always been one of those people who needs to learn and verify things **experientially**. I am an **experiential** learner and I usually must seek out someone to show me what to do, how to do it and thereby, through that **experience**, finally understand.

Because I am an experiential learner, I appreciate the sequence of events described in today's gospel reading. Today we are told of John the Baptist who has the **experience** of baptizing Jesus. John has the **experience** of seeing the Spirit descend upon Jesus in the form of a dove, and **then** he is able to confidently **point** to Jesus as "The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" John's **experience** gave him insight and he could **then** assuredly proclaim who Jesus is.

Because of John's **experience**, two of his disciples decide to follow Jesus to try and learn more about this unusual man. As they begin following him, Jesus turns to them and we hear the very first words Jesus speaks in the gospel of John. What is so fascinating is that Jesus' first words appear in the form of a question as he asks, "What are you looking for?" Jesus, as he frequently does, uses a question to draw these two men into relationship, into the **experience** of relationship with him. It is helpful to look at the original Greek when listening to what Jesus asks. Jesus' question would be better translated as, "What are you seeking?" or "What do you hope to find?" or "What do you **long** for?" And, what I find so captivating is this – Jesus speaks these same words to each one of us as **we** meet him. Jesus asks a question that goes directly to the deep yearnings of our hearts. Jesus' words invite **us** to look into the depth of our being and ask, "What is my deepest longing, what is it I hope to find in this one called Jesus?"

I believe there are many seekers around us who are asking the same question. As a Faith community that desires to engage the greater community, this is something we should keep in mind. I know there are many in our greater community who are **longing** for something more, something deeper in life. As we work to connect to those beyond these

walls, I have to ask each one of you, what is the hallmark of **this** Faith community that we can lift up so others may see who we are, see whose we are, and what we offer in this place?

It is interesting that the disciples reply to Jesus' question by asking where he is staying. Again, it is important to look at the original Greek as we try to make sense of this **experience**. The disciples' question to Jesus goes much deeper than simply asking about a geographical, physical location. The Greek word used implies they are really asking about where Jesus is **dwelling**, where he is **abiding** (a word we find used over and over again in the gospel of John). The disciples are asking Jesus where he is **remaining, abiding, and indwelling**. This question takes us to a deeper place. They want to know where they can come and simply **experience** being with him.

We live in a culture that is all about doing. Our lives are all about what it is that we **do** or must get **done**. I intently feel this focus on **doing**, this doing aspect of life every single day. And I am very aware of it every time we gather for worship. Quite honestly, the plethora of focal points that demand intense **doing** in people's lives takes away from **participation** in the life of the Faith community. Each focal point attempts to demand ultimate concern in people's lives, and a life of faith no longer fits in that

ultimate concern slot. Furthermore, in a culture where more and more of us have our faces buried in our phones or tablets, simply being **with**, abiding **with**, intentionally remaining **with**, and being present **to** someone is increasingly rare. So, what does it mean for **us** to reply to Jesus' question by desiring to come and simply **be** with him?

It is intriguing that Jesus does not offer an answer to the disciples' question. Instead, drawing them ever more deeply into the **experience** of **relationship**, Jesus' response is a simple invitation to "*Come and see*," an invitation that is profoundly relational and experiential. His invitation is non-threatening, simple and very clear. Jesus' response is so beautiful because it is open ended and does not require any prior pre-judged concepts of Jesus. And isn't that the miracle of the Jesus journey? Despite the countless layers of doctrine, dogma, and varied identities the church has put onto Jesus, as well as the requirements so many communities put on prospective followers before they even begin a faith journey, Jesus does **not** do this. His invitation is simply to come, see, and **experience**. *Come and see*. It is an invitation to unprejudiced, undetermined encounter and relationship. It is an adventure where the disciple and the teacher live **together** in relationship. It is an invitation to come and **participate** in this

Jesus reality and it is **the** pathway to life, eternal life which, in John's gospel, means life that truly matters.

Living in relationship is what this faith journey with Jesus **is** all about. When we respond to Jesus' audacious invitation to **come and see**, we begin an **experiential** journey of continual discovery as we learn that this God of whom Jesus speaks is **all** about relationship and love. We will discover more about our very selves, and we will grow in ways we never before thought possible. We will discover true life that is **always** relational, life that is all about a flow of love and a dance of grace.

Jesus' answer, "**Come and see!**" is an answer that captures a primary message of John's Gospel: If you want to know the Word made flesh, **come and see Jesus**. If you want to know what love is like, **come and see Jesus**. If you want to **experience** God's glory, to be filled with bread that never perishes, if you want to quench your thirst with living water, to continually be born anew, to abide in love, **come and see Jesus**. If you want to behold the light of the world, to enter into life everlasting and to experience life that truly matters, **come and see Jesus**. If you want to know God, **come and see Jesus!**

On this weekend we remember Martin Luther King, Jr. We remember the work he did, work which brought transformation to culture. He was able

to do that work because he answered Jesus' call to come and see. He was a person who abided in Christ's love, abided in Christian community, and through community brought change to so many people's lives. That abiding enabled and brought forth necessary change in culture. It happened because all kinds of people came together and experienced living in relationship as the body of Christ.

I said at the beginning that I am an experiential learner and I deeply want to live a life that truly matters. As I long for this in life, I cannot think of a better learning **experience** than responding to Jesus' invitation to **come and see** and **experience** the joy of living in relationship with Him. And, that is something one richly **experiences** when you live in relationship to **others** in the Faith community, when you **participate** in the life of the Faith community, and when we live **together** as the Body of Christ in this place. Lutheran professor, Andy Root, when talking about living together in relationship as a community of Faith, writes:

Relationships of persons encountering persons are **the very way that we encounter Jesus Christ**.....[We live together and go through life together], sharing in the humanity of each other as the very joyous journey of sharing in the life of God.

As we move into a new year, let's be intentional about making this journey together. ***Come and see, experience what the body of Christ has to offer.***