

Pray: "May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be pleasing to you Lord."

The other day I was playing with my two youngest Brock and Gabrielle. We were playing with little toy barn yard animals. I would ask, "What sound does a cow make?" Brock would say, "Mooo." Then I asked what sound does the chicken make?" After a minute or two I would say, "Cluck cluck cluck." It got me to thinking about a toy my brother and I had when we were little. It was about yea round (**use hand gesture for size**) and had a draw string. Around the outside were pictures of animals. Inside the ring there was an arrow. When you pulled the string the arrow would spin and stop to point at one of the animals. Then a voice coming out of the machine would say, "The cow says, Moooo!" Did any of y'all have that toy or remember that toy from when you were growing up? (**pause**) Who can tell me what that toy was called? (**pause**) A "See and Say." Yeah. That's right. A See and Say. This morning's passage has a lot to do with what is seen and what is said.

John the Baptist looked and **saw** Jesus.

John the Baptist **said**, "Behold the Lamb of God."

Two of John's Disciples followed Jesus.

Jesus **saw** the disciples and asked, "**What are you seeking?**"

The disciples asked, "Rabbi, where are you staying?"

Jesus **said**, "**Come and see.**"

This observation is important. I think it is important in a denomination where assessment and accountability are core tenants of who we are as the Body of Christ. In this passage John the Baptist does not assess anyone. John's disciples do not assess or try to **judge** whether Jesus is the Messiah. Jesus does not go down the road of trying to **judge** how devoted John's disciples are to the Gospel. The bottom line in this passage is nobody **judges** anyone.

Here's what does happen. John the Baptist shares with his friends, these two disciples, the wonderful thing he saw, "Behold, the Lamb of God" (John 1:36). The two disciples want to see this good thing their friend and teacher told them so they decide to go and follow Jesus. When Jesus sees them Jesus does not try to run them off like door to door salesmen, or a Jehova's witness. Jesus offers them **grace** – the **grace** of hospitality. They wanted to know where Jesus was staying. When they asked Jesus where He was staying Jesus said, "Come and see."

As I read this passage I observe a kind of monkey see monkey do approach to evangelism. They don't start with **judgment**, or you have to do this or say that if you want to be a Christian. Instead they start off as a friend reaching out to a friend with the **grace** of hospitality saying, "Here, I have found something great! Let me show it to you."

I am reminded of my days as a Boy Scout. I remember seeing the lead boys in other troops and thinking I like the way they do this or the way they do that. Some of those boys became my friends and we learned to lead better together. When I was awarded the rank of Eagle there was a challenge given. A part of that challenge is the call to service. "Eagle Scouts extend a helping hand to those who still toil up Scouting's trail, just as others have helped them in their climb.¹ When it comes to evangelism and sharing our faith with those who are different from us I think there are a lot of similarities.

¹ <https://filestore.scouting.org/filestore/boyscouts/pdf/542-900.pdf> (last viewed 2-6-20).

In Scouting the highest award a Cub Scout can earn is the "Arrow of Light." In Boy Scouts the highest rank a boy can earn is the rank of "Eagle." In Girl Scouts the highest achievement is the "Gold Award." In our Christian walk there is no highest rank. There is only the next peak and the next valley. Like C.S. Lewis's, *Chronicles of Narnia: the Last Battle*, there is always room, "to go further up and further in." There is always room to grow in our walk with Christ, and there will always be deeper wells of love to explore. This leads me to two conclusions. #1 There are always more ways to grow into a deeper more wonderful relationship with God. There is no retirement from ministry. #2 We cannot wait until we have reached the highest rank to turn around and help others in their walk with Christ. We are meant to grow closer to God by walking together.

Retirement is a wonderful concept in terms of our jobs and careers, but think about it for a minute. Can you imagine God saying, you can only come so far and that's it? God's prevenient grace continually calls us to repent and turn to the cross of Jesus Christ. God's justifying grace washes us clean of our sins. God's sanctifying grace leads us down a life-long road of discovery, love and grace. Can you imagine God saying, "No. That's far enough." When Jesus died on the cross the veil was torn and all of the barriers preventing us from drawing closer to God were removed. Why do we so often take it for granted that God loved us enough to remove the barriers between the Holy and the Holy of Holies? (pause) Why do we imagine there is such a thing as retirement from growing in God's love and grace? (pause) The news there is no highest rank to achieve ought to be motivation to continue reaching for the stars – not an excuse to plop down in the grass and explore our belly button. This is good news, and it comes with an important responsibility.

The first people to follow Jesus as His disciples were called followers of the Way of Jesus Christ. When we choose to allow Prevenient, Justifying and Sanctifying grace to move us our response is grow closer to God in love and grace. The move toward God is also a move toward other people. Here's the thing. We will never reach that highest rank which means neither can we wait to reach others until we are perfect, nor can we judge others for not reaching a standard we will truly never reach ourselves. All we can really do is say, "Look, I have seen something really great. You'll never believe it unless you see it for yourself. Let's go see it together."

Scouts: Are you ever supposed to go walking in the woods by yourself? (pause) Why not? (pause) The same is true of our walk with Christ. John Wesley put it this way, "The Bible knows nothing of solitary religion."

My sisters and brothers, if you want to see this church grow. If we want to see our nation turn away from partisan politics and a polarized church, this has to be our approach. If we really want to be a part of the change our community needs then it has to start with Jesus Christ. The change we seek comes from Jesus. We must all seek Jesus. The leaders of our church need to love God so much they are seeking God with the members of our church, and with people in our community. Yes, that means coming to church, but it also means being involved in some form of Bible study/ prayer group/ accountability group. If we are going to lead people to Christ we must start with the person in mirror. We have to be seek Christ for ourselves everyday. Only then can we say to others, "Behold, the Lamb of God." We are not the Lamb of God. John the Baptist was not perfect, and never pretended to be. However, when John the Baptist saw something good – when John the Baptist saw the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, John did not hesitate to tell his friends about the good thing he saw. Should we do anything different? (pause) Are we not expected to follow the example of John the Baptist's disciples? (pause) When we see God we are to take a friend along with us to know God better together? (pause) Are we all not expected to seek Jesus Christ for ourselves. Then when we have found Jesus, and accepted Christ's saving grace we are to tell others what we have seen, and encourage others to walk with us as we grow in our faith together. We are to see Jesus for ourselves, and say what we have seen. We are to offer more grace and less judgment seeing clearly and saying the truth.

In the name of Jesus Christ,

Amen