



conversation, and then by moving forward in faith. Then we look back, and maybe we can see more clearly how God was at work. We ask our questions, and we most often hear in reply: “Come and see.”

It probably won't surprise you to hear that when I was a teenager, I thought I had the answers to all of those big questions about God and life and truth. Especially when you know that I grew up in denominations that were very certain that they did have all the answers. And there was something very comforting and secure in that sense of certainty.

But then it broke.

In college I discovered that my church's black-and-white teachings broke down under all the layers and complexities of real-life dilemmas. And I made Christian friends whose faith was different from what I'd been taught was the only way to believe in Jesus. And I did that dangerous thing of starting to take religion classes, where I learned that Christians have all sorts of beliefs about how salvation worked, and how to understand the Bible, and how God wanted us to behave...and they can back them up with the Bible and church tradition. With all that going on, I had to start thinking: maybe my church didn't have THE answers after all. Maybe everything was way more complicated than I'd be told. And that thought was world-shattering for me. How could I know how to be faithful now that everything seemed less certain, less how I'd expected it to be?

I wonder if John the Baptist and Jesus's disciples felt a similar sense of shock when the messiah actually showed up in their lives. A similar sense of “this is not as simple as I expected it would be.”

In today's reading from the Gospel of John, John the Baptist pointed to Jesus and said, “That's him! That's the Lamb of God!” Andrew and another man heard this and started following Jesus around. Jesus saw them out of the corner of his eye, turned around, and asked, “What are you looking for?”

What were they looking for? We can imagine that they all grew up on stories of the messiah: what he would be like, what he would do. Maybe they each had an image of the messiah that they carried around inside their heads. Someone that would come and save the day, like a superhero. Maybe some of them expected the messiah described in the book of Daniel: “I saw one like a human being coming with the clouds of heaven...to him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him” (Daniel 7:13-14). Maybe some were expecting to see Elijah, the prophet from the Hebrew scriptures, returning in a chariot of fire (Micah 4:5-6). When John declared, “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world,” how did he picture Jesus doing that? I wonder if they expected someone sudden and shocking, or someone fierce and powerful, or someone that would change the world in an instant. Something big and obvious and certain.

Maybe they wanted answers to questions. Maybe they wanted a king who would make Israel the greatest of the nations. Maybe they wanted someone to cleanse the world of sin. What did they think when they saw a man just walking by, like any other man? No coming on the clouds of heaven, no prophets from thousands of years ago...just a man, living like they were living? A man they could doubt was the messiah, a man they would have to try and figure out?

The first question they ask of him is, "Where are you staying?" and the first answer they get from him is, "Come and see."

That is probably the most realistic answer to all the questions we have for God — by which I mean, it's the answer we get most often in our lives. *God, what are you like? God, how should I live? God, what is the truth? God, where are you?* We ask, and what we hear back is: "Come and see."

The disciple's life with Jesus was basically one big "come and see." They followed him, trying to figure out what the messiah was doing: they watched him heal people; they heard his teachings; they saw the way he lived and heard his dreams for the kingdom of God, and gradually they understood more and more.

Even after Jesus had been crucified and raised from the dead, the church continued in the model of "come and see." *How do we deal with these Gentiles who want to become Christians?* they wondered. And as the Jewish Christians went and saw Gentile believers, as they tested the waters of fellowship, they saw how God was working to form a new community. They gradually understood more and more.

When I ask God my questions, I feel the best and most frequent answer I get is "Come and see." God, where are you? *Come and see how the church is the Body of Christ: how the people visit one another in the hospital, how they bring food to those in need, how they challenge and support one another.* "God, what do you want me to do?" *Come along and see: Keep walking forward, then look over your shoulder and see how I've been guiding you.*

When others come to us with their questions about life and faith, maybe "come and see" is the best answer we can give, too. Come and see what inspires me. Come and see the good that my congregation does in our community. Come and see how we wrestle with scripture. Come and see how we live with both doubt and faith. Come and see, and maybe you will see God.

We often long for clear answers to our big questions: how to make decisions, how to know the truth. But God offers us something much sturdier and more long-lasting than a quick answer: God offers us experience and relationship. "Come and see" is an invitation to experience God's presence in our lives, to see God in the new questions that come up as we grow, to see God in new ways as our understanding of the world changes. It is an invitation to relationship with a God who is just as complex as our world and our questions. It is a reminder that God is with us on our journey, even when it's not what we thought it would be. Even when it gets confusing and frustrating and painful. Come and see.