

Two caterpillars were crawling across the grass when a butterfly flew over them. They looked up, and one nudged the other, "You couldn't get me up in one of those things for a million dollars."¹

For weeks, our scripture lessons have invited us to bask in the dawning of Jesus' light, celebrate the birth of God's Son, and experience an invitation to "Come and See" what life is like with this revelation of God in our midst.

What is revelation? It is the surprising discovery of those caterpillars, when they emerge from their cocoons. It is those 'Aha! moments' when things suddenly seem clear. It is a new way of seeing and being, because God has disrupted your life.

I don't know about you, but many days I still feel like a caterpillar or like the people referred to in Isaiah, folks walking in the dark. While I believe that Jesus has come, that he is 'God with us', ... that the Spirit is moving and calling us into God's meaning and purpose; ... light, marking a clear path through all this noise, demand, economic down turn, and threat ... well light, doesn't seem to be piercing the fog ... nor revealing how to find this new life the prophets, John the Baptist, and Jesus keeping talking about.

A professor of theology faced this same struggle with one of his students: "Some 14 years ago, the first day of a new session, he first saw Tommy. Tommy was combing his hair, which hung six inches below his shoulders. The professor's quick judgment wrote him off as strange – very strange.

Tommy turned out to be his biggest challenge. He constantly objected to, or smirked at the possibility of an unconditionally loving God. When he turned in his final exam at the end of the course, he asked in a slightly cynical tone, "Do you think I'll ever find God?"

"No," the professor said emphatically.

"Oh,"... . "I thought that was the product you were pushing."

¹ Hewitt, James S., Illustrations Unlimited (Tyndale House, 1988) pg. 50

He let Tommy get five steps from the door, then called out. "I don't think you'll ever find God, but I am certain God will find you." Tommy shrugged and left.²

As we continue in the Gospel of Matthew, we discover the response to Jesus' revelation, also receives a cold shoulder. John the Baptist has been preparing the way for the light to come. He preached words of repentance and baptized folks in the Jordan River, in preparation for Jesus' arrival,... the one who would usher in the reign and rule of God and restore the people of Israel.

This revelation is a threat. It gets John arrested. Those who are currently in power cannot allow rebel rousers, even men as strange as John, to stir up people's thoughts, hopes, and visions of a possible new government ... change ... life beyond oppression and fear, ... life, under any rule other than the Emperor, must be stopped.

John's arrest meant Jesus was in danger too. As a king, Jesus was faced with a choice. Go to Jerusalem, where the current authority resided and respond to their act of aggression and force with like force and authority. It would be what the people expect and want from their Messiah. It would be a clear blaze of light and sign that indeed, the kingdom of God was about to be restored. It made sense, in light of the way things were.

Instead, Jesus heads north from his hometown of Nazareth, to the fishing village of Capernaum. Some might see this as an act of cowardice, but as Matthew tells the story, this is obedience to God's purposes and plan. If you recall the words of the prophet Isaiah, the region Jesus decides to make his new home has significance for the people of God. It was the site where those once oppressed and living in darkness would be restored by God and light would shine once more. Just as God acted to restore the people of Israel and through them all nations, God is doing it again through the sending of his son, Jesus. God's reign never ends.

Or as Jesus echoes the prophets and John the Baptist, "the kingdom of God has come near, repent ... turn, change the direction of your life, reorient the whole way that you have

² Tell the World for Me by John Powell. "We love, because God first loved us." 1 John 4:19 (<http://ralphmiltonsumors.blogspot.com/2008/01/sermon-helps-for-sunday-january-27th.html>)

been thinking, and act on it.”³ A new day has dawned and you don’t have to live in bondage anymore. Stop putting all your allegiance and trust in powers or leaders to save you. I know the cross seems like foolishness to most, it is the only wisdom you need. Stop seeking to be satisfied by material things, titles, and temporary self-gratification. I am your daily bread to feed your hunger. I am living water, so you’ll never thirst. Stop pointing fingers of blame, making excuses, and using the law to rationalize your mistreatment of others. God desires another way for all peoples. The kingdom is near. Trust this power and authority for your life and live.

As you can see, Jesus hasn’t backed down from the fight; he’s just taken it to a new location. And as he is walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, he sees two brothers, working. You see Peter and Andrew are fishermen, doing what they do every day, casting nets into the sea, with the hope of bringing in a catch of fish. Their father probably taught them how. It was good work. Fed their families. Unlike our culture, where we often are in a state of restlessness or lack trust with our jobs, these men were probably pretty content and certain about their present and future life as fishermen.

That is, until Jesus walked by ... and with two phrases; a command, dependent upon a promise, Jesus disrupts their whole world. “Follow me and I will make you fishers of people.” I don’t know if you know this or not, but this is highly irregular for a Rabbi, a teacher of faith, to do. Rabbis didn’t go out and recruit disciples. ... Instead, they relied solely on the strength of their teaching in the synagogue. A student would come and listen to their instruction. If it connected, then they would tell their friends.

But, here, “Jesus comes to Peter and Andrew. They do not come to him. He sees them. They are busy casting nets; they do not see Jesus. Jesus speaks to them; they do not speak to Jesus.”⁴ But, what floors me, is that they drop their nets and follow. I’d want to ask all the questions children ask on long car rides: Why? Where are we going? How long? What will I be doing? Don’t I need stuff to make the miles go faster? Will it be fun? What will I get out of it?

³The New Interpreter’s Bible: Matthew and Mark (Abingdon Press, Volume VIII) p. 167

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 169

We get no answers to any of these questions. I marveled about this with the Congregational church last week. As the church, trying to proclaim the good news of God's reign in Christ, we are tempted to try to answer all these questions for folks. Fill in all the gaps. Prove that we can make the journey fun, and meaningful, and our arguments for why they should come, air tight. But, what I noticed last week in John and this week in Matthew, ... Jesus doesn't resort to any of this. Instead, Jesus shows tremendous confidence and authority. All he relies upon is his Word: A word of command and promise. His word alone generates faith. People heed his call, because they hear his word and the power of the Holy Spirit plants seeds of belief.

Or as a pastor and theologian William Willimon proclaimed, "You are here, (in church) not because you are searching, but because you have been sought, called, summoned. You are here because God has reached in, grabbed you, put you here, enticed, wooed, allured you here. So Christianity is not so much a religion of discovery. It is a religion of revelation. The long search is over. You have been found. This is the good news."⁵

So, here we are basking in his revelation, listening for how he will make us fish for people. I wish I could tell you exactly what that will look like for each one of you, but not all of you are "fishermen". Some of you are teachers, some of you are farmers, some students, brothers, and sisters, ... some of you are business people, some of you are musicians, parents, scientists, and visionaries. The purpose and claim on our lives is the same in Christ, but God will work differently, ... through each of your lives, ... according to your particular gifts, to reveal the good news of the kingdom of God.

I can tell you, it will become clearer as you spend time in prayer, as you dwell in God's Word, as you feast at this table, and as you serve others' needs with the love, forgiveness, and grace of Christ. It is in these ways, God promised Jesus would find us and shape us into fishers of people, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

I know you are worried about the young man at the beginning of the story. The Word, the professor spoke to Tommy, stayed with him. Yet, he still searched high and low for God, without much luck. He finally told his professor that he gave up altogether and turned to

⁵ <http://home.twcny.rr.com/lyndale/Epiphany3A%202008.htm>

something else his professor had said, “The essential sadness, is to go through life without loving. But, it would be almost equally sad, to leave this world without ever telling those you loved that you loved them.’

So, Tommy spent the time he had, going to his broken family and telling them that he loved them. He marveled to his professor, “Then one day, I turned around and God was there. God didn't come to me when I pleaded. Apparently, God works in a different way and on a different schedule. The important thing is that you were right. God found me, even after I stopped looking.”

Sometimes this is what repentance looks like. And, in this moment of turning, we discover the light was always shining, we were just looking at our shadow, cast because we were heading in the wrong direction.

Yes, we are basking in Jesus’ light, Jesus revelation. While, you might not yet see what this means or where you are headed or what kind of metamorphosis will take place, Jesus sees. God brought you here. So, follow and Jesus will take care of the rest.

The peace that surpasses all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.