

I have a family member, who shall remain nameless, who has the worst time finding things, even when they are right in front of them. When this family member is looking for a can of beans in the cupboard or a box in the closet and can't find them, they inevitably ask others to help. And when you open the cupboard or closet, move something out of the way you'll inevitably discover that the item in question is staring right back at you. Where I come from, they'd say, "If it was a snake, it woulda bit ya." For this family member, seeing things that are right in front of them, right before their eyes, is not something they are good at.

Well, you know, Jesus' cousin John seems to have had the same problem. Jesus, you'll remember from last week, came to see his cousin to be baptized. Jesus and John may or may not have grown up together, but they surely knew each other. Their mothers, besides being kin, were also rather close. When Mary became pregnant by the Holy Spirit, it was to Elizabeth, John's mother, that she went to share the good news. After Jesus and John were both born, we can imagine they were in the very least familiar with each other. So it may seem odd that, despite that familiarity, John confesses in today's gospel, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, but *I myself did not know him*. My whole ministry was pointing toward him, but I didn't recognize him."

Perhaps that experience is not as odd or uncommon as it may seem. I mean, we don't always appreciate those we are closest to us, don't always see them for who they are, for how special they are. Whether we are talking about our child, a friend, our spouse, our parent, we often take those closest to us for granted. We can go years, decades without knowing what their deepest fears are, what the highest hopes, the dreams and even the talents are of people we live with day in and day out. And what is true for relationships with friends and relatives can also be true of the church's relationship with Jesus. How often in the history of the church have we said, "God was active here, though we did not know him." I think of how the Catholic Church was deaf to the objections of Martin Luther, how the German church in the 1920s and 30s ignored warnings by fellow Christians that their support of Hitler was evil and unchristian, how so many people in this country, many of them Christians, resisted the Civil Rights movement. At the time, few Americans would have believed we would be honoring Martin Luther King Jr. tomorrow as a national holiday.

Those of us who preach bear the greatest burden for failing to discern God's actions. For pointing out where Jesus is is the particular responsibility of us pastors and priests. You may not know this, but in many churches, there is often a little brass plate on the preacher's side of the pulpit. It is positioned so that the preacher will see it just before they stand up to preach. On the plaque is inscribed a verse from the Gospel of John: "Sir, we would see Jesus." It is a reminder to us preachers that when all is said and done, people come to a service of Christian worship not to hear political speech, or a book review of the hottest title on the *New York Times* list, or even for meditation and self-reflection, but for an encounter. You've come to encounter the living God, "God with us," in Jesus. Preacher, we want to see Jesus.

Well, you can imagine how that makes us preachers feel. Talk about pressure! Tom Long, a professor of preaching, tells of an old Welsh preacher who was climbing up the staircase into his pulpit, and about half way up he was overcome by the awesomeness of his assignment. He began to back down as if he had seen a ghost, looked out at the congregation, his face pale with fear, and said, "I will not go into that awful place." Fortunately, his calling proved stronger than his fear and he climbed back up the pulpit and preached.

Fact is, every preacher has to overcome his or her anxieties, fears, false sense of modesty, etc, in order to preach. For me, my problem wasn't fear so much as it was just getting the words out, audibly. I was too quiet, I mumbled. When I was just beginning to preach, I was under the belief—the wrong belief---that my words were enough, that the truth of them would be self-evident, that I didn't need to put myself in them. I was corrected by a systematic theologian--of all people!--who reminded me that the Word was enfleshed. And so my words needed to be enfleshed too, in me, in my voice and presentation. That is my challenge every Sunday, to put flesh on my words, to show up not only in mind but in body. That's my challenge, but every preacher has to overcome their anxieties, fears, and mistaken assumptions. And we do it because we are called by God to preach, because the church needs someone to point Jesus out to them, in case they missed him.

We need someone to point Jesus out, because he is not always the easiest to see. Not because he is like a busy CEO who does not have time for us, but because we are hindered in our vision. We look for him in the wrong places and in the wrong ways. We look for him through our own presumptions that blind us, the images we have of Jesus, false images of who he is and what he does for us. There's a reason why we come together each week—to hear the stories of what the *real* Jesus did and said, and celebrate what Jesus is doing in our midst still today. This is the "power of pointing," of pointing to Christ. We need Jesus pointed out to us, to be told "this is what God is doing through Christ," lest we miss him. We need Jesus to be pointed out to us, so that we can in turn point him out to others. For we preachers aren't the only ones charged with pointing to Jesus, showing Jesus to others. Each one of us is charged with being a preacher, a witness, an evangelist. We are all charged to share the good news of what God has done in Christ and is doing through his body, the Church.

Now, before you start freaking out because you think I'm saying that we all need to be on the street corner with placards and a megaphone, consider how the first disciples learned about the good news in today's gospel lesson today. When John said of Jesus, "Look, there's the Lamb of God," a couple of John's disciples began to follow Jesus, but at a safe distance. Then all of a sudden, Jesus turned around and said, "What are you looking for?" What are you seeking? What do you want? A simple question, and straight to the point. Sheepishly, they responded, "Uh... Rabbi, where are you staying?" which at one level means Where do you live? Where's your lodging? But at a deeper, theological level it means, "where are you working in the world?" We'd like to know what this is about before we get too close. What are you doing in the world? To which Jesus responded, "Come and see." And so they did; they came, and they saw. We don't know just what those two saw that first evening, but for Andrew it was enough for him to run at the crack of dawn the next day to find his brother Simon and tell him "We've found the Messiah." You can imagine Simon's response, his incredulity, "What do you mean you found the Messiah? What are you talking about?" And you can imagine Andrew's answer, "Come and see." And so he came and saw who this Jesus was, and was profoundly changed by the

experience—he even got a new name, Cephas or Peter in Greek, signifying the change that happened.

In this episode, we see several things, but the thing that speaks to me is that in telling others about Jesus there was no effort to prove who Jesus was, to convince others about their sinfulness and need for Jesus, no effort to change them or convert them. There was only an invitation—first to name one’s deepest desires, one’s soul-yearnings, What are you looking for?, and then to see for yourself what God is doing through Jesus, Come and see. What are you looking for? Andrew knew that if he brought his brother into the presence of Jesus, that his brother could be transformed just the way that he, Andrew, had been transformed by Christ.

And what privilege and joy that is! The former Archbishop of Canterbury, William Temple, wrote a commentary on John’s Gospel. When he came to the words, “And Andrew brought Simon to Jesus,” Temple made a short but momentous observation: he wrote “The greatest service that one man can render to another.” We don’t hear much more about Andrew in the gospels except that he was always bringing people to Jesus. First, his brother, Simon. Then, a boy with five barley loaves and two fish; and finally, "some Greeks", who were the first to express that pulpit-plaque desire, We would see Jesus. Simon Peter, his brother, went on to be one of the greatest influences in the history of Christianity, converting thousands to Christ with a single sermon. We cannot all be Simon Peters, but we can all do what Andrew did—we can bring someone to Jesus.

I’ll give you a more contemporary example: Albert McMakin. Albert McMakin was a twenty-four-year-old farmer who had come to faith in Christ. He was so full of enthusiasm that he would regularly fill a truck with other young people and take them to a meeting to hear about Jesus. There was a good-looking farmer’s son that McMakin really wanted to go to the meeting, but this young man was hard to persuade. He was busy falling in and out of love with different girls and did not seem to be attracted to Christianity. Eventually, Albert got that farmer’s son to come by promising to let him drive the truck. When they arrived, Albert’s guest decided to go in. He was spellbound and began to have thoughts he had never known before. He went back again and again until one night he went forward and gave his life to Jesus Christ. The year was 1934. That farmer’s son was Billy Graham. Since then, Billy Graham has led thousands to faith in Christ. We cannot all be like Billy Graham, but we can all be like Albert McMakin—we can all bring our friends to Jesus.

Again, bringing someone to Jesus doesn’t mean—or doesn’t *necessarily* mean—converting them to Christ. Simply put, it means bringing them to where they can see Jesus at work. It can be something as simple as inviting them to worship with you. When I moved to Charlottesville a few years ago, I had people tell me about what were the best restaurants to eat at, which barbers, optometrists, etc. to go to. Another person encouraged me repeatedly to go to his Masons meetings. The sense I got was, they’d found something special and they wanted to share it. I have to ask, Do we Christians have the same fervor for inviting and encouraging people to come and participate in our church? If not, why not?

God has shared an amazing gift with us—new life in Christ in the company of the church. This is a gift, a joy, a challenge at times, but most of all a blessing. Why would we not want to share that with others? Why wouldn’t we want them to find and be found by Christ in our midst? In this season after Epiphany, in which we celebrate the appearance of Christ among us, it is our joy to

share Christ with others, to point to him, and invite others meet Christ, to invite them to “come and see.” Thanks be to God!