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John 1:29-42

OUT OF SIGHT, OUT OF MIND:HOW SEEING CHANGES OUR PERSPECTIVE

When I was thirteen, my family moved from Atlanta, Georgia to Birmingham, AL. Birmingham was different from Atlanta in many ways, but perhaps most strikingly, because it was still relatively segregated – despite the fact that it had been thirty years since Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote Letter from a Birmingham Jail. The city was divided into the "over the mountain" communities – where affluent, white people resided – and downtown area and the more rural outskirts of the city where poverty aligned the streets and both whites and blacks found themselves economically challenged. Buses ran only in the poorer areas of town and in fact, two of the five "over the mountain" communities' school systems did not even offer school bus services for their students.

Each "over the mountain" community was a cocoon of white prosperity where the ugly head of income and racial disparity need not show itself. Despite the fact I was only thirteen at the time, I immediately noticed that the layout of the city made it possible for many people in the city to live without ever having to truly see the economic and racial injustices surrounding them. Instead, they could live their lives with blinders on – able to completely avoid areas that might force them to see the many injustices in their city and thus, live guilt free in their comfortable and privileged lives.

Sadly, I often found myself doing the exact same thing – staying well within the confines of my affluent, suburban oasis unaware and therefore, uncaring of the injustices surrounding me just a few miles away because let's face it - seeing can be scary – seeing forces us to acknowledge and calls us to act. And if we're honest with ourselves, a lot of times we'd prefer to stay in the cushy confines of the comfortable lives that we know.

How, you may wonder, does this relate to this morning's texts. Well, pretty simply – the verb "see" is used over and over and over again. And each time the text uses the verb "to see," action follows. Nowhere in this morning's Gospel can someone simply see and stop there.

First, John the Baptists sees Jesus and because John the Baptist sees not only Jesus – but also how the Spirit descended on him and remained on him – John the Baptists testifies that Jesus is the Son of God. Then, John the Baptist calls on his two disciples to see Jesus – telling them – "Look, here is the Lamb of God." And what do you know, they do and they begin to follow Jesus.

And then – Jesus, instead of responding to their question about where he is staying, invites them to come and see – which they do again – despite the fact that this couldn't have been an easy task. After all, they didn't know where Jesus was taking them or what they were going to see or how that was going to change their lives. They had to trust Jesus – they had to trust that he would not lead them to harm, but instead that he would keep them safe as they followed him. And apparently, Jesus did because not only did Simon Peter and Andrew go and see, they remained with Jesus that day. Something about going and seeing Jesus resonated with them so much that they couldn't leave – they had to stay.

I think this text is perfect as we commemorate Martin Luther King, Jr's birthday. Martin Luther King, Jr. grew up as the son of a Baptist preacher. Thus, his family was middle class and much better economically situated than most of the families in his community. As a result, Martin Luther King, Jr. didn't have to see the racial and economic injustices facing others in his community. He could have

lived his life in a relatively comfortable, middle class existence shielding his eyes from the injustices facing those in his community so that he didn't actually have to have the courage to do something about it. But that's not what Martin Luther King, Jr. did. Instead, Martin Luther King, Jr. accepted Jesus' invitation to come and see and he went all over the United States' seeing the injustices facing African American people. And when he saw, he acted - helping to train and lead people for acts of non-violent resistance, participating in his own acts of non-violent resistance, finding himself in jail, and ultimately dying because of what he saw and the call to action that followed.

In a Letter from a Birmingham Jail, Martin Luther King, Jr. explains why he had to go to Birmingham and see the injustices there. In the letter, he explains that as president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, he was asked to be on call in the instance that a non-violent direct action was needed. And when it was needed, he came and saw. But Martin Luther King, Jr. went on to explain in the letter that it really went even deeper than that. He explains that he has to come and see and act because ultimately, we are all connected to one another. He states,

> "Moreover, I am cognizant of the interrelatedness of all communities and states. I cannot sit idly by in Atlanta and not be concerned about what happens in Birmingham. Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. Never again can we afford to live with the narrow, provincial "outside agitator" idea."

See – it seems to me that Martin Luther King, Jr. gets what Jesus, John the Baptist, Simon Peter, and Andrew all get in today's Gospel. They get that we have to come and see – no matter how scary it may be or how much we may not like what we see. And the injustices we will be called to confront – injustices that still loom large and heavy over our heads today – injustices like income inequality, wage theft, gun violence, hunger and poverty issues, criminal justice issues – may not be pretty sights to behold . . . but God's presence and peace will be with us there and because of that – we too, might just want to remain there, just as Simon Peter and Andrew chose to remain with Jesus – just as Martin Luther King, Jr. chose to remain in the fight against the unjust plight of the African American people.

Today's text invites us to come and see and remain . . . to go out into our communities and the world and to really see our neighbors, to learn about both their gifts and their needs – and then to remain – to be present with them, to speak out against and fight the many injustices still present in the world today together as a community. And just as Simon Peter and Andrew remained with Jesus after they accepted his invitation to "Come and See" so will we.