

### ***“Come and You Will See”***

In the name of him who takes away the sin of the world, dear friends in Christ: This morning’s Old Testament lesson comes from the second of the so-called “servant songs” that appear in the book of Isaiah. They’re called the servant songs because in them the prophet, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, gives voice to the Son of God who, speaking directly in the first person, describes the messianic mission assigned him by his heavenly Father. So when we read, *“He said to me, ‘You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified’”* we understand that it is Jesus himself speaking through the prophet – and in this case speaking through the prophet in excess of seven hundred before his being born on earth as a man.

He even mentions his upcoming birth as if it had already happened right at the beginning of the section we heard: *“The Lord called me from the womb, from the body of my mother he named my name.”* And we remember how the angel who came to Mary to tell her that she would bear the holy child told her to name him Jesus. It’s remarkable how it all fits together so. But what I’d really like to draw your attention to are the lines that immediately follow, where we read, *“He made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me a polished arrow; in his quiver he hid me away.”* In these words, the Lord Jesus describes himself as something of a secret weapon: a concealed sword or an exceptional arrow hidden away for a special use.

The latter image is particularly rich. In an age when military archers made most of their own arrows, you can imagine how wherever they went they were always searching for the straightest shafts they could find. As they’re on the march they’re constantly looking around and gathering the materials they need. And then sitting around the campfire at night they craft their arrows, putting on the bronze points, the feathers to stabilize them and so on ... and when they find an exceptionally straight shaft, of just the right weight and diameter they know they’ve got something special. They take extra care with it to ensure there are no flaws that might cause it to veer one way or the other in flight, sanding down and polishing the shaft to eliminate any irregularity. And then they stash it away in the quiver with their other arrows; but they mark it somehow so that they’ll know which one it is. This one is not for one of those the mass volleys of arrows fired as a group when you’ve got an advancing enemy horde to shoot at. No, this one is for that special target that presents itself. Maybe the enemy commander if he happens to come within range, something like that. This is one for an extreme situation when it’s life or death and it’s vitally important that the flight of the arrow be straight and true.

Of course, to the untrained eye it would look pretty much like all the other arrows in your quiver. Indeed, if you were with a group of archers, you might even want to make sure that it looked like all your other arrows so that you wouldn’t have to worry about one of your less than honorable compatriots pilfering your best ones if given the opportunity. You’d want to make sure that *you* can tell the difference so that you don’t waste it by mistake; but you wouldn’t want anyone else to determine at a glance that this was one of your prize arrows.

That’s how the Spirit of Jesus prophetically describes himself now in this passage: as a prized, polished arrow that his Father has hidden away in his quiver for a

very special use. A *very* special use; because this is the arrow that will inflict a mortal wound on *the* enemy and defeat all the dark powers of sin and death at his command. But like I said, to the untrained eye, to the one who doesn't know the Archer's secret, it looks pretty much like all the other arrows in the quiver.

And so, it is that in today's Gospel reading, as crowds of people are listening to John preach and patiently waiting in line for him to baptize them, there strolls by a thirty year old Galilean carpenter who looks like ... well, pretty much all the other Jewish men his age who are in the area. And I think this is where most of our religious art fails us. I mean, you look at any picture that portrays some event in the ministry of our Lord, and it's immediately obvious to you which one is supposed to be Jesus. There's sort of an artist's standard look for him, what with the shoulder-length brown hair, the very northern European facial features, and the neatly groomed and just a shade thicker than wispy beard. The white tunic he wears is always immaculately clean, and the red or blue sash he has on will be brighter and more colorful than anything anyone else is wearing. His pose and posture too will give him away; always more noble and grand than everyone else's. There's no mistaking Jesus. And together these portraits we've all seen and have stuck in our heads create the impression in our minds that if we had been there, we'd know him in an instant.

How very different is the true story. John himself says that he didn't know who Jesus was until he saw the Spirit descend upon him at his baptism. Until that moment Jesus was to him just another face in the crowd, indistinguishable from all the rest. It required a special revelation from above for John to clue in on who it was he was dealing with. And now, in today's reading, which presumably takes place shortly after Jesus has returned from forty days of fasting and being tempted in the wilderness, John sees Jesus coming by and says, "There he is. There's the one I've been telling you about. Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." And no one picks up on it. You can visualize everybody looking around and saying, "Where? Where is he? I don't see anybody special. What's John talking about?" To be sure, if *this is* when Jesus is just coming back from his temptation, then you can imagine what they would see: a ragged fellow, unwashed, haggard, gaunt; looking very much like someone just pulled him through a knot hole. Hardly a very inspiring figure. The eyes of the crowd would naturally dance right over him in search of someone who looked a whole lot more like he might be the Lord's Messiah.

Things wouldn't be much different the next day either; but we can assume that by now at least Jesus has had a chance to tidy up a bit and get himself something to eat. Still, he wouldn't have presented a very polished image. At best his appearance would be a notch or two below average. John sees him passing by and again he points him out to any and all who are willing to listen. And this is key: no one spots Jesus for who and what he is by mere outward observation. He must be pointed out by someone who knows the secret. As it happens, this time two of John's disciples are on hand. They hear what their teacher says. They see to whom he is pointing. And I have to believe that they're a bit disappointed. "What? Him? That guy right there? Are you sure? He sure doesn't look like the Messiah we've been waiting for."

Nevertheless, they've come to trust John. They know him to be a straight shooter and a brutally honest preacher of God's Word. He is not given to practical jokes, and even if he were this is not something he would joke about. So, if John says this is the One, well, he's got to be it – or at least our teacher thinks so. So, despite what they see they begin to follow this very ordinary looking man ... probably rather hesitantly, I

should guess, their minds full of questions and doubts. He's not at all what they were expecting to see. So, they walk along behind him – but not too close. They follow at a safe distance conjecturing about the mysterious man striding on ahead. As they go along, they exchange expressions that say, "What do you think?" "I don't know." "Where do you suppose he's going?" "How in the world would I know?" "D'you suppose we should say something to him?" "Yeah. Sure. *You* go right ahead. I'll watch."

And then, right before they step into him, they pull up short. He's stopped and turned around and is staring at them. He studies their startled faces for a moment and then asks, "What are you seeking?" It's an insightful question because it gets right to the heart of what's on their minds. "You're looking for something. There's something you want to see; something you want to know, isn't there? What is it?" And the correct answer would be, "We want to know if you really are who John said you are. We want to know if you're the Promised Redeemer of Israel." That's what they want to know; but it would be kind of tough to just blurt that out, wouldn't it? It's a rather awkward question to ask a perfect stranger – especially one whose appearance falls so short of expectations. So, taken by surprise as they are, and not wishing to be rude, they ask something simpler that falls substantially short of their true question. "So, uh, where are you staying?"

Jesus responds, "Come and you will see." And when he says it, I think he means a whole lot more than "I'll show you where I'm staying." He means, "Come with me and you'll see if what you're wondering about me is true. Come with me and I will show you the truth." And too, when he says, "you *will* see", he acknowledges that they do not yet see everything as they should. But by coming with him their eyes will be opened and they will come to see in him exactly what they're looking for.

And see they did. Just think about what these two men would see in the years that followed. They'd see this very ordinary looking man astound crowds with his profound teachings of God's grace and mercy. They'd see him heal the sick and lame, feed thousands with a few loaves of bread; they'd see him walk on water and still storms with a single command. They'd see him raise dead people to life. They'd watch as he overturned the tables of money changers in the Temple. And they'd watch too as he overturned their entire religious system and whole way of thinking about God.

Yes, Jesus had a lot to show them – and not just about himself. On the way he would show them the truth about themselves too. He'd show them how limited was their understanding of things spiritual. He'd show them how weak and erratic was their faith in the promises of God. He'd show them their selfish ambitions, their pride, and their relentless pursuit of power and position over others. He'd show them how far they were from having the kind of love that God requires.

But then instead of condemning them for their failures, he'd show them what God's love really looks like. In an upper room in Jerusalem he'd show them how to lead as a lowly servant by washing their feet. He'd show them enduring faith and friendship by praying for them after they'd all fallen asleep. He'd show them loyalty by asking that they remain free when he was taken. He'd show them patience in unjust suffering by his bitter passion and death on the cross. And then he'd show himself to them alive after he had risen from the dead. He'd show them the wounds in his hands and side from which flowed the blood that earned their forgiveness. And in that forgiveness, he'd show them the peace of God that passes all understanding.

And then he'd really open their eyes. On the road to Emmaus he'd show them himself in every passage of Scripture. In his ascension he'd show them his exaltation to the right hand of God's throne. On Pentecost he'd show them his Spirit descend upon them as flames of fire to equip them to go forth and share the good news. And then he'd open their eyes to a world of lost sinners who need to come to him so that they too can begin to find what they're seeking.

Yes, Jesus had a lot for them to see; but I'm certain that if he had told them that first day what was in store, they would not have believed a word of it. "How is this very plain looking, no account carpenter going to show us all that? It's simply not possible." No, they had to go with Jesus to see. And over time, step by step, he revealed more of the power, wisdom, beauty, and love that were as yet hidden from their eyes.

And these are lessons that apply equally to us, the followers of Jesus today. First, that no one is able to spot Jesus on his or her own and realize who it is they're dealing with. People who don't know him must be directed to Jesus by someone who does see, by someone who has already been enlightened by the Spirit of truth. Secondly, what they see in Jesus especially at first may not be very much. You think of how Jesus appears to us today: in his Word that we hear read and expounded upon in a sermon, in a handful of water, or in a sip of wine and a morsel of bread. To the recent convert it can all be quite baffling, "I just don't see it or understand how it could be so". But over time Jesus reveals more of himself. Things start to click. A person's eyes are opened to see more of the truth. The light shines a little brighter. And it never really stops. Though it shouldn't, it always amazes me how I can be reading along in the Scripture and suddenly there in a passage I never quite understood or that I skipped over a hundred times thinking it to be inconsequential—bam! There's Jesus where's he's been all along unnoticed staring back and asking, "Why are you so surprised? Didn't I tell you that you would find me here? Come with me, I've plenty more to show you: insights about me and about yourself, insights about how you can follow me more closely and be of greater service to me in my kingdom. Come with me, for in all eternity I'm never going to run out of things to show you."

And one final lesson is given to us by the example of Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. What's noteworthy about him is how quickly he comes to see the truth about Jesus and its importance for others. After being exposed to Jesus for just a few hours he's eager to share his discovery. Now in truth at this point he knows very little about Jesus, and we know from the way the story unfolds that a lot of what he thinks he knows about the Messiah is wrong. It makes no difference. He's met Jesus and that's enough to invite his brother to meet him too. I think sometimes we get it in our heads that we need a degree in theology or a special course in evangelism to share Christ with others. That's nonsense. All we really have to do is point him out where he is – right here where he meets with us in the church – here where he reveals himself to us in his Word and Sacraments. Jesus will do the work of showing himself. All we have to do is point people in the right direction. All we have to do is say with Andrew, "We have found the Christ; I want you to meet him too." And if someone asks, "How do you know for sure?" we can respond, "Come and you will see." In Jesus' name. Amen.

***Soli Deo Gloria!***