

Meditation on John 1: 35-39
May 1, 2016
Hamilton Union Presbyterian Church

I wrote this meditation on the evening following our visit with detainees in custody at a federal prison in Florence, Arizona who were seeking asylum. We met in pairs with four different men. At each table was an interpreter. Each of them was fleeing from threats of violence from either government or gangs. Interestingly, none of the men was from Mexico. They came from Nicaragua, Guatemala and Honduras. This meditation attempts to express what happened to me when an “illegal alien” or “undocumented immigrant” became a human being with a name and a story.

The next day, (John the Baptist) was there (by the river) with two of his disciples. When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, “Look, the Lamb of God!” When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, “What do you want?” They said, “Rabbi (which means teacher) “Where are you staying?” He said to them, “Come and see. “So they went and saw where he was staying , and they remained with him that day.

We have been told that Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world; the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire; the one of whom our teacher said he was not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal.

But this is not enough. We must follow and discover for ourselves who this man is. Jesus must never become a right answer to a theological question. He must never become a “what”: a Lamb, a Savior, a Messiah. He must always be a “who” who expands and extends into us and in whom we become to ourselves and to others a “who.”

So we follow.

“What do you want?” he asks. To ask, “We want to know if you really are *what* John says you are” he will never become a “who”—nor will we.

And so, tripping over our words, we ask, “Rabbi, where are you staying?” By this we mean: your location in relation to where we are—Mordecai’s house, Simon’s Inn, around the corner and a mile down the road from where we stand. With no hint of irony or hesitation he says, “Come and see.”

So we go and see.

It turns out that the location could not have been *less* important. To be with Jesus *anywhere*—whether sitting or walking *is to be where he is staying*. He was actually staying with us as we walked with him.

We have also learned some other things:

- ❖ That when Jesus says, “Come and see” he means that seeing is much more than the image we receive when we look at something. To “see” as he means it is to behold that to which mere sight is blind: the love which created and creates the universe, the soulfulness of all creation, the deep preciousness of all humanity—*their “who-ness”* which is hidden by the way we turn God’s “whos” into “whats” and “its.”
- ❖ We learned that Jesus “stays” with and in the very people we consider to be “whats”: problems to be dealt with, those who, if they didn’t exist would make life more peaceful and uncomplicated.
- ❖ We learned that love is the short road to transforming “whats” into “whos.”

But we also learned this: To see we must *come*; we must follow this Teacher—for we can never learn to “see” from the safety of our protected lives. Following him will take us where we would never go on our own. Yet *with him* we discover what true seeing is. We see, find and embrace not “whats” but “whos”:

In prisons for immigrant detainees seeking asylums who have names: Edwin, Elmer, Juan, Jason.

And in so doing *we* become “whos”—those with whom Jesus *stays*. Amen.