

Green Hill Presbyterian Church
“Come and See”
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Ordinary 2—January 19, 2020

Lessons: 1 Corinthians 1:1-9; John 1:29-42

When we moved to Wilmington nearly five years ago, I changed my membership from the Presbytery of Southern New England to New Castle Presbytery. You may know that in the Presbyterian Church, ministers are not members of local congregations. We belong to a presbytery, so when we move, we join a new presbytery. I joined New Castle Presbytery in March 2016 at a meeting in Ocean City, Maryland. I'd had the chance to visit some of the local churches here in Wilmington, but I did not know Green Hill. What I had read on line suggested that I might not find a home here, so I didn't explore. Thankfully for me, God had other plans for us. At that meeting of Presbytery, two elders from this church introduced themselves to me and invited me to “come and see” Green Hill Church for myself. I'm awfully glad they did. The best way to see what a church is like is to come and see. That frankly is how the church started in the first place.

John the Baptist was drawing large crowds and then one day Jesus appeared and immediately John pointed away from himself and towards Jesus: “Here is the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” The next day John was standing with two of his disciples and again Jesus walked by and John proclaims: “Look! Here is the lamb of God!” Immediately those disciples left John and started following Jesus, asking him where he was staying and Jesus responded: “Come and see.” Come and discover for yourself. That is how the church is born. A simple invitation. Point to God and God's activity in the world and invite others to see for themselves. It was Karl Barth, the great German theologian who used to say that “anybody who stops on the sidewalk and points upward will draw a crowd of onlookers, each one looking up to see what's captured another's attention.”¹ How might we do that here?

Professor Roger Nishioka talks of the What Would Jesus Do? Campaign and wonders if instead of wearing WWJD, instead we should wear WWJBD—What would John the Baptist do? “Lately,” he says, “I have been challenging myself and my students to be more like John the Baptist—to call attention to Jesus Christ and then to say to all who are within hearing distance, “Hey, look! See! God is alive. God is in our midst. The Holy Spirit is at work in us and through and for us and even in spite of us! Behold! The Lamb of God!”²

That is something you know how to do. You know how to point to God's activity in the world. Keep that up. As you do so, remember that you that you are not responsible for everything. You are not called to solve all the problems of our world. You are not called to do all the work in this place. Our calling is to point to God's activity in the world, to invite others to come and see. Nishioka tells another story: “A couple of years ago, a good friend and colleague here at the seminary, who was concerned about my schedule and commitments and hectic pace and looking tired, insisted on taking me out to lunch and said it was urgent. When we sat down at the table, I asked what was going on. She told me she had some good news for me. Perplexed, I asked her what the good news was. She

¹ William Willimon, Sunday, January 19, 2014: Isaiah 49:1-7; John 1:29-42, in *The Christian Century*, Vol 131 No. 1 January 8, 2014 © 2014.

² Roger Nishioka, *Pastoral Perspective*, John 1:29-42 in *Feasting on the Word: Year A, Volume 1: Advent through Transfiguration*, Barbara Brown Taylor & David L. Bartlett, editors. Presbyterian Publishing Company ©

smiled and said, ‘I want you to know the Messiah has come!’ Now I was thoroughly confused, so she told me she had even better news for me: ‘You are not him!’”³

We have lots of work to do but the Messiah has already come and it isn’t you. Point to God’s activity in the world and follow Jesus by extending the kind of hospitality he modeled: Come and See! Remember that Jesus’ hospitality could be controversial. The religious leaders complained that he often hung around with the wrong crowd. He modeled for us all the kind of community where all are welcome—all are welcome. Come and see that place. Help others know they are welcome.

Mark Ralls writes that “I was leaving church one evening as the Alcoholic Anonymous meeting was about to adjourn. I noticed a man crouched over the hood of a rusty Ford and introduced myself as one of the pastors. He sighed and told me how long he had intended to ‘get back to church.’ I invited him to worship. His face flushed and he launched into the story of his life. It was the familiar string of regrets and loss that accompany addiction. We shared a prayer and said, ‘Good night.’ As I was walking to my car, he called after me with urgency. ‘Did you mean what you said?’ ‘About what?’ I asked. ‘Did you mean that *I* could come to *this* church?’ Driving home, it occurred to me that he had told me his life’s story as a response to my invitation. It was his polite way of explaining why he couldn’t take me up on my offer. He felt he wasn’t ‘clean enough’ to be included in our congregation.

“I never saw him again. I wish my response to his questions had been more direct. I wish I had simply repeated the words of Christ. I wish I had said, ‘Come and see.’”⁴

As you continue to invite others to come and see what God is doing in this place, practice the kind of hospitality that embodies our opening welcome: whoever you are and wherever you are on your journey of faith, you are welcome here to share in the blessings of God, the grace of God, the mercy of God which are abundantly given. Might the warmth of Green Hill reflect that controversial hospitality that was central to Jesus’ ministry?

As we prepare to move into a new chapter of our lives, I find myself drawn to Paul’s words today to the church in Corinth: “I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind — just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you — so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.” Those are good words for our anxious souls. We already have the gifts we need: gifts of grace, of speech and knowledge. I’ve seen that grace at work in Bible studies and Meals on Wheels deliveries. I’ve seen it in the simple and profound ways you care for each other. I’ve seen it when we sing hymns you love—most often from the red hymnal--and there is an electricity in this place. I’ve seen it at Mission and Prayer breakfasts and with Teen Challenge and Sunday Breakfast Mission Choirs. I’ve seen it with Bruce dancing down the center aisle, leading our children. Thanks be to God for the grace you have been given, and God isn’t through. There are more gifts God will continue to give because God is faithful.

Thank you for being who you are. Thank you for all the ways you live the faith. Thank you for teaching me and welcoming us into your hearts. My good friend Gene McAfee reminded me what that great African St. Augustine said in his *Confessions* that the only way, ultimately, not to lose those we love is to love them in and through God, whose love transcends all limitations and separations.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Mark Ralls, The other “H” word. 1 Corinthians 1:29-42, in *The Christian Century*, Vol 122 No. 1, January 11, 2005. © 2005.

We will still be here in Wilmington, of course, though I will not be here. In that space in my heart where our risen Savior has prepared a room, you will always have a home.

Let us pray: and my prayer today comes from Bob Raines in his book *Leaving Home*: “Lord, I entrust now these dear persons to your care, in whose care they have been since their birth and will be beyond their death and [mine]. I leave them in your gracious hands as I go in your gracious hands. Care for me and for them. Let us find our own ways and let them be within your ways. As we separate and the ties unbind and the threads of our lives disentangle, and we make ready for new weaving, let us believe in our hearts that nothing we have shared together that is good will be lost, that all we were takes its honored place in our life’s journey, that nothing is cancelled, but some things are settled and concluded, that much we cannot say or communicate, nonetheless abides and endures, that nothing can separate us from your love, in your love.” All this we pray in the name of Jesus Christ our Savior and our friend. Amen.