

There are a lot of reasons that John the Baptist's disciples should never have expected to get an invitation.

Let's start with whom their leader is.

John the Baptist wears odd clothes and practices weird dietary habits. Other gospel writers tell us that John dresses in camel skin hair shirts and subsists on locusts and wild honey.

Then there's where their leader, John, lives:

in the wilderness, the boonies, outside the seat of power, on the fringes, where his disciples, presumably, join him.

Then, of course, there's what John the Baptist says:

That the ax is at the root of the tree, so repent, change your life.

And, by the way, he'll dunk you in river water to help you do that.

In our gospel text today,

John the Baptist cries, "Here is the Lamb of God!"

at what is clearly a *person*, not a sheep.

Then John relates a strange vision that he—and perhaps no one else—saw when the Spirit descended from heaven like a dove and remained on the man whom John is calling a Lamb.

All you long-term church-goers who know this story and phrase:

I want you to suspend that prior knowledge and familiarity for a moment and think for a moment about how *weird* what John is saying is.

"After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me."

What does that even mean?

"I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me . . . [this is the Son of God]"

So John the Baptist hears voices about people he does not know?

John says,

"I saw it . . . I myself have seen . . ."

when meanwhile, no one else has seen it.

Imagine what kinds of labels

John the Baptist's disciples would have applied to them simply by association with him.

Weirdos follow weirdos, right?
 People may have considered John's disciples crazy,
 questionable and outlandish,
 extreme in their views and deviant in their way of life.
 All of these associations and more
 would surely have kept John the Baptist and his disciples
 from ever being welcomed into other groups,
 or invited to other functions.
 Maybe even their closest family members kept their distance.

Yes, they were folks who never felt *invited*.
 They didn't have to wonder *whether* everyone
 was hanging out without them
 because they knew everyone already was.

But then something changes.
 Inside them, perhaps.
 These disciples hear their leader John identify this man, Jesus,
 as the one who takes away the sin of the world,
 as the one who is the Word of God, the true Light from true light.
 They hear John and see him identify this man Jesus as the Son of God
 twice.
 And—here's where they do something brave—on the second time,
 they go after Jesus.

These disciples, stereotyped and labeled ostracized and isolated,
 they don't have it in them to start a conversation with Jesus.
 But Jesus does.
When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them,
"What are you looking for?"
"Rabbi," they said to him,
 which translated means Teacher.
 "Rabbi" would have been what they called their leader John;
 it's a term of respect, a form of address they're used to using.
 But I also like to imagine that "Rabbi" is also these disciple's attempt at
 flattery,
 because they do not yet know whether they are welcomed followers.
"Where are you staying?" they ask.

It's the best, or perhaps most underplayed, innocuous question
they can muster
in the moment.

The next words out of Jesus' mouth are
predictable for us who know the guy:

"Come and see."

"Come and see."

It's another way of saying,

"Come with me."

"Let's go together."

Or to put it in other words,

"You're invited."

"Come and see."

"You're invited."

These are *not* words that these two disciples of John the Baptist are used to
hearing.

Perhaps they were expecting a nasty, *"What do you think you're doing?"*
or a nice but passive aggressive,

"Isn't John the Baptist wondering where you are?"

I can imagine that

at the moment these two disciples expect rejection

Jesus instead issues

an invitation.

Come and see.

It's not an admonition.

It's not even a demand.

Not compulsion or pressure-loaded expectation.

But an *invitation.*

Come and see.

And those two disciples, they do.

*"They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that
day."*

And what a day it must have been!
 Feeling included for the first time . . . in a while.
 Receiving welcome, not rebuke, from a stranger.
 “Come and see,” Jesus says,
 because he knows God has something to show them.
 God has a place for them.
 Another community where they will *belong*.
 A kingdom of love and acceptance
 where all can come in and see.

Friends, we all know people
 who long to hear those words of invitation, “Come and see.”
 For people who’ve been burned or hurt by a previous church experience
 or bad theology,
 an invitation—not a demand—to simply “Come and see”
 can be the difference between walking away from the faith
 and holding onto it.
 For people who live on the fringes of our society
 or at the edges of our economy
 or in the shadows beyond our citizenry,
 an invitation—not an admonition—to “Come and see”
 can begin a process of belonging never experienced before.

I bet everyone here knows *someone*
 whose life God can make more abundant with love and welcome
 if only a disciple would come to them and say, “Come and see.”

No, I don’t bet on that. I know it.
 Because it happens right here in the text,
 on the day when John’s two disciples stayed with Jesus
 until four o’clock in the afternoon.

*One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew,
 Simon Peter's brother. Andrew first found his brother Simon and said to
 him, "We have found the Messiah." And he brought Simon to Jesus, who
 looked at him and said,
 "I know who you are! And I've been waiting to welcome you."¹*

1. (last part, my own).

It's a simple method:
issuing the invitation to "Come and see";
But it's still the best.
Because it's the one that God uses on us every week:
Welcoming *all* of us in this place.
Carving out a place for each of us to belong in this community.
Building among us, with baptism at the font
and bread shared around this table,
a kingdom of unconditional love and grace-filled acceptance
where Jesus meets us and says,
"I know who you are! And I've been waiting to welcome you,"
so that we,
like Andrew first did,
can tell just one other person who we know needs to hear the good news
to "Come and see."

AMEN.