

Come and See
A Sermon by David Barker
January 15, 2012

Scripture: Genesis 28:10-15
John 1:43-51

I once attended a Quaker meeting for worship

- Terry and I had wandered from the church...well, no, that's not quite right...we'd wandered from God, from Jesus, and we were finding our way back
- part of the journey had taken me through Quakerism
 - now, for much of my life, what I knew of Quakers was the smiling man in the funny hat on the oatmeal box
- but as I began to learn more about the Religious Society of Friends, as the Quakers are known, there is much about Quaker theology and practice that speaks to me
 - their insistence on an individual relationship with Jesus Christ, though one lived out very much in community...
 - their emphasis on the Holy Spirit...
 - the way that Quaker faith cannot be separated from Quaker life...Quakers have the strength of their convictions and they live them...
- yet I'd never experienced a Quaker meeting for worship...not, that is, until one Sunday morning when Terry and I were living in Missouri and found ourselves in a Quaker Meetinghouse

- Terry, growing up Episcopalian, and I, growing up Presbyterian, were children of liturgy
 - you go to church, sit in the sanctuary, and things happen...
 - there is an order, certain words spoken and sung in a certain way at a certain time in a certain place each and every Sunday
 - and there is very little silence
 - just like what's known in radio as "dead air," silence in worship is to be avoided, it seems
 - think how uncomfortable it gets if the liturgist lets the moment for silent confession go on too long
- but in a Quaker meeting for worship...it begins in silence...it proceeds in silence...it ends in silence
 - rows of people sitting in pews arranged in a square, eyes closed, silent... waiting on the Spirit

--true enough, the silence is broken from time to time as someone feels led by the Spirit to share
 --mostly it's speech, but at the meeting Terry and I attended a very old woman in a very old voice began to sing...a verse or two of *Were You There?*
--apart, though, from the occasional comment or voice raised briefly in song: *silence*
--with all these people sitting still, mostly quiet, and were you, like me, a child of liturgy, you might be tempted to conclude that at a Quaker meeting for worship, nothing much is going on, nothing much happens...but you'd be wrong
--it's difficult to sit quietly for 60 minutes...at least it was for me...and much of the first half hour or so I was fighting to quiet my mind, but gradually I did...
 --and gradually I became aware of a profound sense of the presence of God in that place, among all those people sitting still...
 --there, in the silence...*Jesus*

Perhaps Terry and I are too programmed by too many Sundays of singing and preaching and praying, but the Quaker meeting for worship didn't really work for us...we did not go back
--I later attended a meeting in Austin, having much the same experience...
--yet, while I'll likely never be a practicing Quaker, often I think about the silence there... or, more to the point, I think about the noise *here*

When I say the noise here, I don't mean this particular family of faith, nor do I mean our worship is noise even if, at times, it can be noisy...

--I mean the Christian church in general and how much time we spend *talking*
--that's an odd statement coming from someone who talks as much as I do
 --my bread and butter is my verbosity...I talk, I use words for a living
 --writing and publishing and lecturing as an academic...now, as a pastor, writing and teaching and preaching and praying
 --growing up, in fact, I was always being put in the corner for talking too much
 --my nickname was "motor mouth"
 --to this day—Terry will tell you—I talk too much...I think out loud...I self-edit, but you're caught in the middle of it as I say the same thing three different ways, looking for just the best way to put it
--even now: here I am...*talking*

Sometimes the church's talk is in service to a greater good—thank you, Jesus—but, often, I think, not so much because, often, the talk is in service to something else

--consider all the talk expended in the name of defending the faith

--I don't mean apologetics—explaining what we believe and why we believe it

--I mean talk about who's in and who's out...talk peppered with "you must," "you can't," "we cannot permit"...talk about how a set of values, a way of life is under attack...

--talk—arguing, really—about worship, about music in worship, about video screens in worship...about communion—when to have it, how to have it, who can serve it, who can take it...what color to paint the fellowship hall, what missions to support, even in some churches what political candidates to support

--*talk*

Thinking about the talk, the noise...and thinking about the silence...I wonder if, maybe, we should spend less time defending the faith and more time actually living it

I don't know about you, but I've never met anyone talked into being a Christian

--in the first place, there's just too much about being a Christian that doesn't make sense...not in a rational, intellectual, let's line this out, point A, point B, point C kind of way

--in-your-face-do-you-know-Jesus-as-your-Lord-and-Savior evangelism just turns people off

--and the guilt and fear approach—if you die tonight will you wake up in heaven tomorrow?—in my experience, at least, just makes people laugh

--people may ask questions about the faith and even find our answers compelling, but most people I know who become Christians do so based on *experience*

--either they've experienced something in their own lives or, just as often, have observed it in the lives of others...they've seen how someone who's a Christian *lives*

Philip, called by Jesus to follow him, goes and finds Nathanael

--Nathanael, Philip tells him, we have found the Messiah

--little was said when Philip found the Messiah...virtually no talk at all...two words, in fact, only three syllables between them: *Follow me*

--Philip sees Jesus, recognizes him for who he is, and follows

--and so it is when Nathanael asks, The Messiah? From Nazareth? Really? Can anything good come from Nazareth?, Philip responds not by defending the faith but with virtually no talk at all...just three words: *Come and see*

Nathanael does come, he does see...sees Jesus and, in seeing him, recognizes him as the Son of God...Messiah...the Christ

--and Jesus responds, do you believe in me because of what I told you, that I saw you under the fig tree before, in fact, you ever came into view...

--or do you believe because of what, looking at me, you *see*?

--and for all you see now, you will see far more...the very heavens opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man

--signs, in other words, as in Jacob's vision of a ladder, that heaven and earth are connected, that God *is* with us

The Apostle Paul tells us we live by faith, and not by sight

--well, eventually...

--but, in my experience, at least, faith itself arises because of what we see...in other people...in ourselves

--as we come to trust what we see, it becomes easier to trust what we cannot, becomes easier, indeed, to live by faith

Mahatma Gandhi once was asked what he thought of Christianity

--he thought a moment, and then he said, "I like your Christ but I do not like your Christians"

--the person who posed the question to Gandhi was taken slightly aback: Why is that? the person asked

--because, Gandhi responded, "Your Christians are so unlike your Christ"

What if in defense of the faith, the only three words you or I ever had to speak were these: *come and see*

--what if, in response to those who are searching, those who are questioning, those who are hurting, those who are angry or feel betrayed or are condemning or rejecting or ridiculing...what if all we needed to say was *come and see*...

--not because we could, literally, take someone by the hand and lead them to Christ, take them to where, in the flesh, Christ stood

--not because we could show them Jesus...but because, through how I live and how you live, we could show them Jesus *in us*

--show them Christians like Christ

Were we to put less effort into defending the faith and more into living it, how much less noisy might we be...how much easier to know Christ

--it was, after all, the same Gandhi who said, "Your Christians are so unlike your Christ" who also said this: "Live like Jesus did, and the world will listen"