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Christ Lutheran Church, Ferndale, WA

Second Sunday after Epiphany

January 15, 2023

Isaiah 49:1-7; Psalm 40:1-11; I Corinthians 1:1-9; John 1:29-42

You've probably been in an airport or a train station or another public place where you've heard the announcement or seen a sign that says, "if you see something, say something." It means that if you see a person or situation or package that seems suspicious, if you're concerned that something bad might happen, tell someone in authority. If you see something, say something.

Now I doubt that there was a similar sign hanging around first century Palestine, but I'm wondering if John inherently knew that if he saw something—not suspicious or bad in this case but rather phenomenal and life-giving—he should say something. So he did. When John the Baptist saw Jesus coming toward him, he said something about it – "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove and it remained on him." "Look, here is the Lamb of God."

John kept saying what he was seeing. And that caused two more disciples to see Jesus, and then Jesus invited them to come and see where he was staying, and then one of those disciples, Andrew, told his brother Simon, "We have found the Messiah," and then Simon Peter met Jesus, and then Peter became the rock upon which the entire Christian church was built. You and I are sitting here today because all those years ago John the Baptist said what he saw. If you see something, say something.

This weekend we are celebrating the life of one of the greatest figures of all time who said what he saw, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. I was looking back at some of MLK's sermons this week and was once again astounded by the ways that MLK saw Jesus as well as saw the reality of his life and the lives of others around him and said something about it.

In a sermon about loving your enemies, MLK preached, "Yes, I can see Jesus walking around the hills and the valleys of Palestine. And I can see him

looking out at the Roman Empire with all of her fascinating and intricate military machinery. But in the midst of that, I can hear him saying: "I will not use this method. Neither will I hate the Roman Empire."

In a sermon on the story of the Good Samaritan and relating it to the plight of sanitation workers in Memphis, MLK preached, "That's the question before you tonight. Not, "If I stop to help the sanitation workers, what will happen to my job. Not, "If I stop to help the sanitation workers what will happen to all of the hours that I usually spend in my office every day and every week as a pastor?" The question is not, "If I stop to help this man in need, what will happen to me?" The question is, "If I do not stop to help the sanitation workers, what will happen to them?" That's the question."

And in a sermon called, "Our God is Able," MLK told this story: "One night toward the end of January I settled into bed late, after a strenuous day. My wife had already fallen asleep and just as I was about to doze off the telephone rang. An angry voice said, "Listen, nigger, we've taken all we want from you; before next week you'll be sorry you ever came to Montgomery." I hung up, but I couldn't sleep. It seemed that all of my fears had come down on me at once. I had reached the saturation point.

I got out of bed and began to walk the floor. Finally I went to the kitchen and heated a pot of coffee. I was ready to give up. With my cup of coffee sitting untouched before me I tried to think of a way to move out of the picture without appearing a coward. In this state of exhaustion, when my courage had all but gone, I decided to take my problem to God. With my head in my hands, I bowed over the kitchen table and prayed aloud. The words I spoke to God that midnight are still vivid in my memory. "I am here taking a stand for what I believe is right. But now I am afraid. The people are looking to me for leadership, and if I stand before them without strength and courage, they too will falter. I am at the end of my powers. I have nothing left. I've come to the point where I can't face it alone."

At that moment I experienced the presence of the Divine as I had never experienced Him before. It seemed as though I could hear the quiet assurance of an inner voice saying: "Stand up for righteousness, stand up for truth; and God will be at your side forever." Almost at once my fears began to go. My uncertainty disappeared. I was ready to face anything. The outer

situation remained the same, but God had given me the inner calm to face it.”

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. told story after story after story about how he saw God, saw Jesus, saw himself, saw the world—and it changed this country and improved and even saved the lives of more people than we can probably even count.

Now we’re not all preachers like Martin Luther King, Jr. Heck, I even *am* a preacher and I’m nothing like Martin Luther King, Jr.! But when was the last time you saw Jesus and said something about it? I don’t mean standing on a street corner with a Bible shouting at people. I mean when have you noticed Jesus’ presence in your life or the life of someone you love and acknowledged it? When have you known that Jesus led you or calmed you or healed you and you actually said to someone, “I think the reason I got through that, the reason I feel calm, or the reason I am healed is because Jesus was with me.” When have you seen something holy happen and actually said something about it?

The psalmist today is a good model for us. In Psalm 40 the psalmist said what he saw and experienced:

“I waited patiently upon the Lord who stooped to me and heard my cry....The Lord lifted me out of the desolate pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a high cliff, making my footing sure....I have spoken of your faithfulness and your deliverance; I have not concealed your steadfast love and truth from the great assembly.”

Basically, when the psalmist saw God at work, the psalmist actually said it out loud. What if you tried this week to say out loud what you might be thinking in your head or feeling in your heart? What if you witness an act of kindness or see justice brought about, and you said, “in my experience, in my vocabulary, that’s the work of the Holy Spirit.”

Or when a friend or family member tells you they’re afraid, what if you told them the story of how God spoke to Martin Luther King, Jr. at the kitchen table that night, so that maybe they can experience that same inner calm.

By saying something like that, you’re not telling someone else what to believe, you’re not shoving the Bible down their throats, you’re simply

saying what you’re seeing or using the experiences of others to connect what’s happening to the work of God.

Now I know you might feel uncomfortable or nervous about doing this. You might think that you have to be a preacher to preach, but you don’t need to be a preacher or even plan all the words you’ll say. In your baptism you have received what you need. In I Corinthians today we heard, “for in every way you have been enriched him, in speech and knowledge of every kind...so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift.”

And let me remind you of something. When John said to those two disciples, “look, here is the Lamb of God,” it was Jesus who did the rest of the work. All John did was point Jesus out. He didn’t try to convince them that they should follow Jesus or become Christian, he just saw Jesus and said something about it, and Jesus invited those two disciples to come and see.

In the same way, when you acknowledge the holy, Jesus will do the rest of the work. So when you see something, say something, because you might be the only gospel that someone ever hears. Amen.