

# “Come On, Come Out”

The Rev. S. Shane Nanney – April 24, 2022

Acts 5:27-32 and John 20:19-31

John’s resurrection narratives are all focused on getting out of the tomb. The gospel story of Jesus’ ministry – the preaching, the teaching, the healing – is offered as a way to get all those listening to “come on” to Christ in faith. After the crucifixion, his followers fled and scattered hiding themselves from the authorities, fearful of the consequences of their discipleship.

Then the resurrection, the miracle of Easter, changes everything. John’s gospel insists that they “come out” – stop their cowering, crawl out of their tombs of fear, and get to work.

In John, Christ’s words of commissioning are imposing. He hands over total responsibility for his earthly mission to his disciples – “*AS THE FATHER HAS SENT ME, SO I SEND YOU.*” Nothing less than a full continuation of Christ’s love and commitment is ordered, a tall order for fewer than a dozen terrified students hidden in a locked room.

Is the church today hunkered down for safety in some quiet corner of culture? It’s not hard to feel that a “bunker mentality” might be appropriate. In every city you can find several big, beautiful, cathedral-style churches that harbor a handful of worshipers each Sunday – then they close up tight the rest of the week. In struggling urban neighborhoods, far more children are in gangs than in Sunday school. Popular culture likes to portray people of faith as **gutless, gullible Bible-beaters**, or as **sleazy, two-faced con artists**. Why? Because we do it to ourselves. We don’t denounce those types of Christians as different from us, so we get lopped in with them.

At best, it seems the church has a kind of frumpy, musty, image – harmless, out of touch, and visited only once or twice a year on special occasions. So, what are we doing about these false images, these stereotypes of lies? Far too often do we take the disciples’ earliest post-resurrection stance – hiding out, while waiting for the hostile hordes to come and break down our doors. Like the disciples, we want a sign, a miraculous visitation all our own, before we dare to venture back out into the mainstream of life.

What would happen if we suddenly took the risen Jesus seriously when we proclaimed before Doubting Thomas and the other disciples: “*BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO HAVE NOT SEEN AND YET HAVE COME TO BELIEVE?*” We have become steeped in the cliché “seeing is believing.” But the church of Christ is founded on a complete reversal of that hypothesis. First you believe, then you see. Believing is seeing. Believing provides the vision, the insight, the perception necessary to change things, to make things happen.

Ever hear the story about the two men who were sent by a shoe manufacturer to a remote country to sell shoes? One wrote back, “I have terrible news. This is a God-forsaken country. Nobody here wears shoes. I’m coming home.” The other man wrote, “This is a wonderful country. I am so glad you sent me here. Nobody wears shoes. Send me 5000 pairs.”

It is the ability to see that releases power in our lives. The wrong perspective is imprisonment; the right perspective is empowerment.

Jesus could work with people who had to see first, in order to believe. That is what his post-resurrection appearances were all about. But for those who believe without seeing, Jesus offers something special – a blessing. When Thomas finally comes to belief after viewing the risen Christ face-to-face, Jesus acknowledges his faith, but offers no special blessing. It is to future believers, to those who will only hear about Jesus, yet who believe and in turn pass the gospel on to others, that Jesus bestows his special blessing.

We are those disciples – at least the most recent generation of them. The church is made up of all those who have believed without seeing. We are the recipients of Jesus’ special blessing. We have also received the breath of the Holy Spirit to empower us as we go into the world. So, what’s stopping us? What is keeping us hidden away?

Part of the problem is that we have let what we believe become separated from the way we act. But what if we let Jesus’ proclamation “*FIRST YOU BELIEVE, THEN YOU SEE*” spill over into all our lives – not just “the religious part?” If we believe that God is in the midst of a great work today, that the best days of the church are in the future and not the past – then we can begin to see it.

Of course, between believing and seeing is a lot of hard work. Believing isn’t the same thing as wishing. Believing takes blood, sweat, and tears. It also requires enthusiasm, energy, and zeal. To get from believing to seeing takes two kinds

of leaders, two kinds of action – and they are the same two types that John’s gospel highlights.

First, there are the indigenous Christians – those in our midst who really do “get it,” who see the vision. Indigenous Christians believe and communicate that the church today can be as vital a part of the body of the risen Lord as it has ever been. These are the faithful who call others to “Come on.” They call others to catch the vision and to dream the dreams.

The author of a respected equestrian study guide tells what is required to become adept at jumping horses over tall fence barriers. In describing how the rider overcomes his own hesitation, the writer states, “Take your heart and throw it over the fence and then jump after it.”

Second, there are the indignant Christians – those who scold the church and the culture for their doubting discipleship and fearful followers. While indigenous believers enthusiastically call others to “come on” to Christ, the indignant Christians challenge the church with a “come out” emphasis.

Today more than ever, we need indignant believers to stand up in the midst of their congregations and silence the naysaying, deep sighing, gloom and doom attitudes that pervade our churches. And there are more than a handful of our own members who need to hear the words to “Come Out” of their fear and move forward to following Christ.

What happens when the spirit of an indigenous and indignant faith takes hold; when “come on” and “come out” become our watch words; then believing is seeing.

Churches with unmet pledges don’t slash their budgets. They make the needs known to the community and expect surprising, even supernatural results.

Churches with that “silver-haired” look don’t mourn the loss of their youth, they start a special “third age” (60 and over) ministry that takes full advantage of the gifts of wisdom, courage, experience, and time of these aged, sage members of our community.

A writer told about a monk who had long planned to go to Jerusalem to see the Holy tomb. He finally began with the money he had saved over 40 years. Soon after he left the monastery, he passed a field where a pale, thin man was digging roots out of the ground and he said to the monk, “Good morning, Father. Where are you going?” The monk replied, “I am going to Jerusalem to see the Holy

tomb, where Christ was buried, and I am going to march around it three times and pray.” The man in the field said, “That trip will cost much money.” “Yes,” said the monk, “all my life’s savings.” Then the man suggested, “Father, why not march around me three times and give me the money so that my wife and children might have food.” And the monk did.

The monk never saw where Christ was buried. But he saw where Christ was alive and living – in other people!

Believing is seeing. The best days are still ahead. Believe in Christ and all that Christ is going to do in your life, your church, and your community, and you will see it. Amen.