**WEST CENTER CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH, UCC January 25, 2015**

***Come and See***

**A Sermon for Martin Luther King, Jr. Weekend, A Week Later**

**by The Rev. John M. Barrett**

**WELCOME**

Good morning and welcome to worship. We were iced out or you might say, iced in, last Sunday, so today we are using the service that was planned for last Sunday, January 18th, during Martin Luther King, Jr. Weekend.

I am both surprised and pleased to announce that today is the tenth anniversary of my being installed as Senior Pastor of West Center Congregational Church, United Church of Christ.

Sunday, January 30th, 2005, was a day of celebration -- with my family and lots of friends from Judson Church and the New York City Gay Men's Chorus, as well as local clergy in attendance for the afternoon ceremony, which featured an augmented choir and instrumentalists.

Then in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, but without the last trumpet, it's somehow January 25th, 2015, and a decade has flown by. So I thank God and I thank you for my call and installation as your Pastor ten years ago --- and for all the glad and sad, times we have shared and have yet to share in this miracle that is West Center Church.

**MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR**

In honor of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., I will now read excerpts from one his speeches. The speech is not his famous “I Have a Dream,” which has become so familiar. Today’s speech caught my eye because its title seems so relevant today: “Where Do We Go from Here?”

The speech was given in Atlanta, Georgia, to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference on August 16th, 1967. Martin Luther King, Jr. was shot and killed nine months later, in April 1968 in Memphis, Tennessee.

In the mid to late 60’s some African-Americans thought that Martin Luther King was going too slowly; they didn’t like his doctrine of non-violence. They wanted to use force to get what they wanted now. When King gave the speech in 1967, the Black Panther Party was increasing in influence. In the 1970’s the Black Panthers were overshadowed by the Black Liberation Army, an underground militant organization. In “Where Do We Go from Here?” Martin Luther King responds to people promoting violence.

(If you Google “Martin Luther King, Jr. Speech Where Do We Go from Here?” you will find the complete text.}

**THE GOSPEL WITNESS** John 1:43-51

This is the story of Jesus calling the third and fourth of his twelve disciples. Prior to these verses, Jesus has called Andrew and Simon to be disciples. Jesus decides to name Simon, Peter because Peter will be the rock on which Jesus will build the church. (“Peter” or “Petros” in Greek means “rock.”) In this morning’s reading, Jesus calls Philip and Nathaniel, but Nathaniel is not too sure about following Jesus --- at first.

**SERMON**

When Philip tells Nathaniel that he has found “Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth,” “about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote,” Nathaniel is doubtful. Nazareth was a little bit of a place. Nazareth was not even on a main road.

So Nathaniel responds, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”

And rather than trying to convince Nathaniel that Jesus is the one foretold by Moses and the prophets, Philip issues an invitation: “Come and see.” Come and see, Nathaniel, and decide for yourself.

It is interesting that in the verses of John’s Gospel that precede these verses, when Jesus is calling his first disciples, Andrew and Peter, Jesus says, to them, these same words, “Come and see,” when Andrew and Peter ask Jesus where he is staying.

Andrew and Peter came and saw. They came and saw where Jesus was staying, and they remained with Jesus that day and all the days that followed.

So it seems that if we are to be followers of Jesus, it is important that we do not follow Jesus on the recommendation of others, but rather, that we first come and see, come and see Jesus, and then, and only then, when he know who he is, follow him.

Nathaniel goes and sees Jesus, and Jesus likes Nathaniel from the start, saying, “Here is truly an Israelite in which there is no deceit!”

Nathaniel asks Jesus, “Where did you get to know me?” perhaps implying, “How can you know me when I don’t know you?”

But Nathaniel is very impressed that Jesus knows where he was sitting right before Philip called him --- under the fig tree.

Nathaniel exclaims, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the king of Israel!”

Jesus smiles and tells Nathaniel, “You haven’t seen anything yet!” And Jesus paints a picture of heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man,” which is equivalent to “the Son of God.”

By painting this picture, Jesus may have been alluding to his Transfiguration on the mountaintop, where Jesus became dazzling white in the presence of Moses and Elijah.

The lesson I find for us in today’s Gospel story is the importance of verifying things for ourselves, the importance of getting information firsthand, the importance of gaining experience before we commit. We may have preconceived notions that are absolutely wrong, and we won’t know we are wrong if we don’t go and see, go and find out for ourselves.

“Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Well, let’s go and meet a Nazarene, or even better let’s go to Nazareth and see what the place is about.

Martin Luther King, Jr. invited people to march with him, to sit at a lunch counter with him, to ride a bus with him, to risk life and limb with him. And people did; they came from all over the country. What they saw, what they experienced, transformed them into activists, strengthened their resolve or turned them into martyrs.

And like them, there is still much for us to go and see, whether we go in person or travel by way of reading or film, or via the internet and other social media. There are new worlds to visit, new customs to learn, new foods to eat, new people to meet, and perhaps even new identities to form.

The first disciples of Jesus were fishermen. Jesus invited them to leave their fishing nets, to leave their fishing nets and come with him to fish for people, bringing them to God through Jesus’ teachings, his healings, his death, and his victory.

The twelve disciples and the women who joined them became teachers and healers in their own right, drawing upon their own unique strengths. Jesus sent his disciples out two by two, like young Mormon missionaries are sent today, to make a difference in peoples’ lives, to help people know God and live Godly lives.

We might ask ourselves, where are we being called to “Come and see?” What new worlds await us? What difference can we make in those worlds, and what difference can those worlds make in us?

Would you like to know more about Islam or the snowy owl? How about freedom of speech or God’s love? Why not mindfulness or healthy cooking, immigration or climate change?

Jesus is inviting us, as he invited Andrew and Peter. Phillip is inviting us, as he invited Nathaniel.

So let us take Jesus and Philip up on their invitation. Let’s go and see what we can see. Let’s see what difference seeing makes in us, and what difference we can make in the world, as disciples of our Lord. Amen.

**HYMN OF RESPONSE**

“Lord, I Want to Be a Christian”

**MORNING PRAYERS/LORD’S PRAYER**

Let us now enter into a time and space for prayer, as we pray today prayers of The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

*O God, we thank you for the fact that you have inspired men and women in all nations and in all cultures. We call you different names: some call you Allah; some call you Elohim; some call you Jehovah; some call you Brahma; some call you the Unmoved Mover. But we know that these are all names for one and the same God.*

*We thank you for your church, founded upon your Word, that challenges us to do more than sing and pray, but go out and work as though the very answer to our prayers depended on us and not upon you. Help us to realize that humanity was created to shine like the stars and live on through all eternity. Keep us, we pray, in perfect peace.*

*Help us to walk together, pray together, sing together, and live together until that day when all God's children -- Black, White, Red, Brown and Yellow -- will rejoice in one common band of humanity in the reign of our Lord and of our God, we pray.*

*All this we ask in the name of the one who taught us when we pray to say, “Our Father, …*

**BENEDICTION**

And now may we go in peace, to see and know, and know and see, the Lord in all that we encounter and experience, in all the difference we can make in your world. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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