

Leaving Home: Come and See

*A sermon preached by Emily Hull McGee on John 1:29-42
on January 18, 2026, with First Baptist Church on Fifth, Winston-Salem, NC*

I.

“Experience the glow!,” all the advertisements read, scattered as they were around the tiny island of Vieques off the coast of Puerto Rico. That glow they described? Bioluminescence, which comes from a mysterious alchemy of a bay completely uninhabited by humans, ringed in mangrove trees, its water deep and warm and calm, which allows the dinoflagellate phytoplankton to glow bright blue when agitated. Josh and I had read that experiencing a glass-bottomed kayak tour of the world’s brightest bioluminescent bay was a not-to-miss experience on Vieques when we traveled there for an anniversary trip last summer. We signed ourselves right up on a night just after the new moon, overlooking the glaringly, glowingly obvious lack of kayaking experience. How hard could it be?

At 10:00pm on a Tuesday, we gathered with 20 other tourists to board a midsize school bus, which took us 30 minutes down the potholed and rutted dirt road ending at Mosquito Bay. We stepped out – woozy and unsure of what was to come – and met Mateo, our cheerful guide, who quickly made sure each of us had life jackets, paddles, and a kayak to board. Amidst all the illumination a few flashlights offered, Mateo gave us our instructions: a 60-second tutorial on paddling and stabilizing the kayak, a reminder to look for the little light on the back of his boat lest we find ourselves floating to Colombia, and our plan to pause in the heart of the bay once we’d all arrived. Each kayak held two people, and as we lined up, somehow Josh and I were at the back of the line of our group. He got in first and front as the one of us

who'd done this before, and as I stepped in gingerly, I had a brief flash of alarm. *What exactly had we signed ourselves up for?!*

A flash turned into full-blown panic as we pushed off from the shore. The rest of our group had already paddled far away from us. I could barely see the leader's light up ahead. I think Josh was hollering back at me to tell me how to paddle, but a fat load of good that did me – his voice was lost to the wind. Water was splashing into the boat at each pull. I hadn't exactly gotten situated in my seat before the guides pushed us off from shore, but now I was terrified to move lest I topple us over! And for days, I had smugly resisted those waterproof bags sold up and down the island for a night like this, scoffing at the gullible tourists who actually *bought* those things, but now I was kicking myself – internally, because who moves an actual inch while in such a precarious position!? – for foolishly thinking I'd snap a picture while out in the bay, and thus, tucking our phones in a simple crossbody bag with absolutely nothing but my thin tank top protecting it from the water. I just *knew* our kayak would topple, our phones would sink, we'd flail and float to Colombia, and no one in the actual world would know where to find us!

"Can you believe this view?," I finally heard Josh say excitedly from the front of the kayak. View? What view?! The view of the back of his head? The view of my churning stomach or racing heart or catastrophizing brain?

"What?," I choked out in fear.

"Look down!," I heard him say.

It was as if every droplet of water was lit from within. Purples and blues and indigos glimmering just below the surface. I watched Josh dip his hand in the water, and what looked like a handful of diamonds spilled out. Every

paddle stroke? Glow. Every splash? Radiance. Every move across that bay? An invitation to wonder.

I had been so consumed in terror by what was obscured from view, I hadn't even thought to look for the marvel we actually came to see.

II.

"Come and see," Jesus will say to his first and newest disciples as his ministry begins in the Gospel of John. But not before John the Baptist saw Jesus coming and declared him the Lamb of God. Not before he reminded his hearers of Jesus' baptism and how the glory of God was revealed. Not before he stood with a few others and again said, "look, here is the son of God!" Not before those friends of John found their curiosity piqued and began to follow Jesus. Not before Jesus asked them a question that echoes throughout the ages for us all: "what are you looking for?" He will say these words to the disciples, after they ask him, "rabbi, where are you staying?" Meaning: where do you exist in this world? And where are you headed? Are you this way or that? Where can we locate you?

"Come and see," he will say. They will go with him to where he stayed and remain until the afternoon. They will be named as Andrew and Simon. They will exchange words of astonishment - "we have found the Messiah!" Andrew will exclaim. And Jesus will look deeply at Simon and gift him with a name and a calling: Cephas, Peter, the rock upon which the Lamb of God will build his people.

"Come and see," he will say, and they can't possibly know how it will transform their lives. How he will move to the margins among the sick and the underserved. How he'll heal and serve. How he'll call them to fish for people, he'll call them "salt and light," he'll call them to love God and neighbor,

he'll call them to leave the homes of their lives to follow him all the way home. How that path will lead past overturned tables and an angry empire, how it will take them from the table, to the basin, to the cross, to the tomb. "Come and see," he will say. They'll go where he goes and see what he sees. And they won't even realize that the love they're finding is what they've been looking for all along.

III.

"Come and see," he says, but oh how often we don't want to go where Jesus beckons us. Like countless witnesses of the called in our scriptures – Moses and Isaiah, Jeremiah and Eli – we don't feel ready or equipped. We wonder if someone else should be chosen for the call, or if another season of our lives would be more appropriate than this one to answer. We are just fine right where we are, thank you very much! We've finally gotten our relationships, our jobs, our resources, our rhythms, all of it situated in place. "Come and see," he says, but we are tired. Afraid. Despairing. Unsure. Sometimes we feel that we can't move a muscle lest we capsize our whole lives. *Come?* Jesus, how about we just stay!

"Come and see," he says, but oh how often we don't want to see what or who Jesus invites us to notice. Seeing asks us to look, to perceive what we may have missed before, to lift our eyes from what is directly in our path. We figure that observing differently might ask us to change our minds or commitments, and the opinions and convictions we already have are just fine, thank you very much! In a saturation of news and a frenzy for our attention, we feel weary from all this world already demands us to see. Out of our worry or exhaustion, our fear or complacency, we train our eyes on what is

just around us, for that feels like enough for today. *See?* Jesus, how about we just avoid!

IV.

On this weekend when we remember the life and unparalleled legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., we reject the notion that he has become larger in his life than in his death. For all the good he did, Dr. King was simply a man – human and flawed and worried and exhausted just like the rest of us. There came a time when his tireless efforts in this country’s movement of civil rights had worn him down to a bone-deep depression he just couldn’t shake. His migraines were unyielding. His family was constantly under threat. The long arc of justice seemed to bend *away* from justice with every law, every rule, every act of oppression that lingered. Late one night he prayed to God for a path that could lead him out of the work and back into a normal life, and still preserve his dignity and integrity. “I am at the end of my powers,” he said to God. “I have nothing left. I’ve come to the point where I can’t face it alone.” And in his darkest night, he heard a voice from the Lord. “Stand up for truth,” it said. “Stand up for righteousness.”¹ “Come and see,” perhaps.

From that experience came one of his most relatable encouragements that resounded then and now: “If you can't fly then run, if you can't run then walk, if you can't walk then crawl, but whatever you do you have to keep moving forward.”² Dr. King knew that, as Langston Hughes says on the cover of the worship guide, “these walls oppression builds will have to go!” But sometimes, the fears of the darkness keep us from seeing God’s brilliant hand at work, lighting the way. Sometimes God’s work of Love is harder than we think we have capacity to accomplish. Sometimes we wonder if we can really

¹ Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., *Stride Towards Freedom: The Montgomery Story*.

² Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., “Keep Moving Forward,” Spelman College, April 1960.

leave home at all. But we carry on. We keep moving forward, even if all we have to offer is a crawl.

V.

Every time I read this passage from the Gospel of John, I'm struck that Jesus's first question to his followers was, "What are you looking for?," and his first instruction was "come and see." Isn't that discipleship in a nutshell? Isn't that the heart of the Christian experience? Isn't that the summons of our very lives? Next week we'll hear how this invitation of Jesus will be passed to Philip and then to Nathaniel, who in the face of a call from Jesus and a suspicious wondering if anything good can come out of Nazareth, the invitation will be the same: "come and see," one will say to another. For there is but one way to discover if what Jesus promises will be true.³

"Come and see," Jesus says, and in the pause between stimulus and response, we ask ourselves: can we? Will we? Will we leave the comforts of all our physical and emotional homes to go where Jesus goes? Will we look through the darkness and despair to see the Light of the world, glowing with a radiance that cannot be extinguished? Will we live these days, this year, this life with a holy curiosity for what God has in store? Will we allow ourselves to be seen by Jesus too?

For you see, what we miss, he catches. When we hesitate, he carries on. When we falter, he gives us the strength to crawl, and walk, and run, and fly. When we find ourselves so consumed in terror by what is obscured from view, Jesus tips up our chin, asks us to take a courageous step, and look for the marvel we actually came to see.

³ Lovely connection and turn of phrase from Frederick Buechner, "Come and See," *Secrets in the Dark: A Life in Sermons*, p54.

“Come and see,” he says. *Come and see.*