

## ***A Simple, Complex Command***

Seventh Sunday of Easter  
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Sunday, May 16, 2010  
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church

Revelation 22: 12-14, 16-17, 20-21

Stories and metaphors – sometimes that’s the only way to convey the deeper meaning of our faith and to awaken our imaginations to the mystery of God’s love and grace. It is why Jesus taught using those stories we call parables. So, let’s begin with one of each this morning, a story and a metaphor, as a way to explore the words of John the theologian in the epilogue and last chapter of his dramatic Revelation, read as our second lesson this morning.

First, the true story. More than anything else, Edward wanted God to forgive his son, Keith. More than anything else, Edward wanted desperately to find peace within himself so that he could forgive Keith for taking his own life. For several months after the tragedy, this father carried within him the fear that his son was lost forever. He could not even speak his son’s name because of his broken-heartedness.

Then, prompted by the open, sky-filled space as he drove with friends across the prairie of Nebraska, he turned and told them of a dream he had just experienced a few nights before:

*I noticed someone walking in the distance. The person wore my son’s favorite red flannel shirt. I looked more closely. It was Keith. I followed him at a safe but curious distance. Then I looked up and there stood another man. He also wore a red plaid flannel shirt. The second man stood facing my son, and I knew him. It was Christ. Jesus’ open and welcoming arms were beckoning Keith to come to him.*

This faithful Christian then confessed to his friends that he honestly did not know if his dream were fantasy, wishful thinking, a sign of his own precarious state of mind, or what it was. All he knew for certain was that something had melted within him – most of the anger was gone and all of his fear.

The dream felt like a strange gift of some sort. The image of his son enfolded in Christ’s compassionate embrace had begun to replace the picture of the closed casket. The dream brought comfort. A piece of the grief had melted away to reveal a quiet assurance. He told his friends, “It was like I heard Jesus say: ‘Come, it is I, Jesus, waiting to welcome you.’” The father just knew in his heart and with his mind that his son was safe and whole again.

“Come . . . it is I, Jesus.” With arms open and welcoming, the word is “Come;” one little word; one little, welcoming, simple, complex word: “Come.”

Now for the metaphor to consider. Did you know that molasses plays an important role in guide-dog obedience school? As part of their extensive training, a blob of molasses is slathered on concrete as the leashed dogs are lead to a relief area. It is there to tempt them. It is there to test their training and their obedience.

You see, the idea is for the naturally curious dogs to ignore that tempting scent without so much as a sniff. Were that blob toxic, it could be fatal for the dog. So, teaching them to trust the command to "come" becomes a crucial part of their training. Working within a covenant of shared responsibility, it is imperative for a guide dog and his owner to trust one another. When the owner, who needs this dog to survive in the world, says "Come," the dog needs to obey and yield. It must ignore the distraction of others -- of someone across the street who tries to lure the dog over there; or the child who wants to play because that's the only thing they know that dogs do; or the person enticing them with a bit of food. It must concentrate on its relationship with the owner.

That little word, "Come," is a come-no-matter-what issue. "Come," not "get over here now!" spoken with anger. Not come so I can punish you. Not come so that I can show you who's boss. But "come" out of mutual need and respect; come with your head held high, tail-wagging; a ready-for-whatever trust.

For a guide dog, the command to "come" is an invitation to work. It says, "I respect the dog part of you that is easily distracted. I respect the guide part of you that thirsts for work and reward." And somehow, guide dog trainers will tell us, these smart and obedient dogs sense that respect and respond to it with faithfulness.

And with this attitude instilled and taught, "Come" becomes a tool of instant understanding. When Treasure, the black lab, allowed another barking dog to rattle her or a scampering squirrel to distract her, the command to "come" returned her to her tasks and to her owner.

For Dolly, "Come" was a sweet sound because she lived to hear it. It meant she was doing what she was trained and loved to do. It meant she was focused and not distracted by that which was all around her. It meant she could trust the love and the command of her master with utter and sheer confidence. "Come" felt like words of home -- where warmth, comfort, and trust lived.

In today's second reading from the Revelation of John of Patmos, we hear this command given to him and passed on down through generations of Christians so that it reaches our ears today. "The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come.' And let everyone who hears say, 'Come.' And let everyone who is thirsty come. Let anyone who wishes to take the water of life as a gift, come."

And as we hear and reflect on that command, we can't help but recall the words of our Master and Friend who says to all: "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."

It is a simple, yet complex command. The modifiers we use to explain the word "come" don't do it justice; words like: coax, urge, demand, entice, implore, insist, order, persuade. It is a word, a command, with such deep roots in our souls that sometimes it represents no words at all, but just an image of Keith standing with Jesus in red plaid flannel; or the arms of Christ outstretched welcoming all of us to comfort and solace; to peace and wholeness.

Like the first command we hear as we begin the Church year cycle each December, the Advent "Come," where we light candles to dispel the darkness, the "Come" of Revelation, of this last book, this last word of scripture for our ears to hear, this "Come" is an offer, an invitation, too. It is an invitation that answers the deepest yearnings of our hearts for comfort, and the deepest echoes of our souls for peace, and the deepest recesses of our minds for solace. It is a welcoming word; a welcome home to the only place where we can know what love and forgiveness and grace can truly mean.

Please note -- this is not a command to come when we feel we are worthy, or ready, or have our lives all figured out and in order. This is an invitation to come regardless of our addictions, our foibles, our sinfulness, our illnesses of body, mind or spirit, our paralyzed and frozen spirits. It is a command that carries no burden or charge. Just invitation. It is sheer gift and utter promise.

It is also a command that we are invited to share with others. I sometimes think that we get so comfortable in our little church-world that we forget that we are commanded in the great commission to "go and make disciples of all nations." That means we are to offer the invitation to come so that others may share in this Good News we know in Jesus the Christ. If we truly believe this message we proclaim, that Christ died and rose from the dead, that our sins are forgiven through His cross, that we can know new life only through him, that love and forgiveness and grace and mercy are more than words spoken but a way of life for those claimed in the waters of baptism, then we are charged to share that message with others and the way we do that is to share the invitation we are all given: to "Come."

And what is our response to this invitation? John gives us the word: "Maranatha," a word that simply means: "Come, Lord Jesus." They are words taken from the earliest acclamation of the 1<sup>st</sup> century church and woven into the fabric of our worship and, hopefully, into the fiber of our lives. In response to Jesus invitation, in anticipation of his great gift of life for us, all we can do is utter a welcoming and open response: "Maranatha; Amen, come Lord Jesus!" "Our hearts are empty, Lord God, until you do. Our souls long for your embrace. Our lives yearn for your love. And we need the grace you have to give us to live our daily lives."

Indeed, "Amen, come Lord Jesus."