

“So, Where are You Staying Tonight?”

Presented By Pastor Scott Walters on 1/20/19
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“What are you looking for?”

This is the question Jesus asks of the two men who seemed to be following him. To this question, they answer in effect: “Uh, well, depends. Where are you staying?”

If Jane goes on a trip for her work, sometimes I’m able to trail behind. I remember talking to a concierge at the Palmer House in Chicago. She said that a good percentage of the guests that come to the Palmer House are like Jane – they don’t leave the confines of the hotel during their stay. Their focus is not in seeing the sights or shopping on the Magnificent Mile. They have meetings to attend. Although she also said there are a few guests who have no meetings to attend. They just want to stay within the confines of what the hotel has to offer.

But the question Jesus asked Andrew and his friend had nothing to do with accommodations. It was a simple, direct question: “What do you want?” The NRSV translates it: “What are you looking for?”

Perhaps the disciples, if they were thinking about making a commitment to following Jesus, were wise to be cautious. So they deflect Jesus’ question that cuts to the core of their meaningless existence and ask a question of their own: “Rabbi, where are you staying?” In other words, “Where are you making your home in the world?”

Jesus said to them, as he says to us, “Come and see,” and he took them to where he was staying. They stayed with him for a whole day, and, as it turned out, stayed with him for the rest of their lives.

The point is this: Disciples are those who want to stay with Jesus, wherever that stay may be and wherever it may take them. You hit the road with Jesus and you’re not likely to be staying at the Palmer House.

So when Jesus calls to us to “Come and see,” this is what he’s talking about. Come and see what a life of meaning and purpose looks like.

When Jesus asked Martin Luther King to “come and see” it’s not as though King didn’t have other options. (reference Loder letter)

But as King himself writes in this letter, he wasn’t sure about his path. He didn’t know where this path would take him. He had no idea, for example, that the place Jesus wanted him to see was the inside of a Birmingham jail.

The jail was not a particularly charming or comfortable place to stay when he checked in during April of 1963. On Good Friday afternoon, King was among 54 marchers who were arrested and thrown into jail for violating an injunction against “parading, demonstrating, boycotting, trespassing and picketing.” They were even forbidden to engage in “conduct customarily known as ‘kneel-ins’ in churches.”

King received no first-class treatment in jail; in fact, he was singled out for isolation and denied the chance to make phone calls or talk to his lawyers. He had no mattress or linen, and was sleeping on metal slats. And yet, over that Easter weekend, deep in solitary confinement, down in what is called “the hole,” sealed off from his fellow prisoners and the outside world, Martin Luther King, Jr. was staying with Jesus.

It was while he was locked up that King wrote one of the most significant Christian documents of the civil rights movement: his “Letter from Birmingham Jail.” Sometimes people are surprised to discover that the letter was addressed to a group of eight moderate clergymen who were urging people to withdraw from demonstrations, which they called “unwise and untimely.”

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King responded to their criticism that his marches were “untimely.” He told the white clergymen that “we must use time creatively and forever real that the time is always ripe to do right.” He pointed out that “it is easy for those who have never felt the stinging darts of segregation to say, ‘Wait.’”

King rebuked his clergy colleagues with these words:

“I must make two honest confessions to you, my Christian and Jewish brothers. First, I must confess that over the last few years I have been gravely disappointed with the white moderate. I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro’s great stumbling block is not the White Citizen’s Council-er or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate who is more devoted to ‘order’ than to justice, who prefers a negative peace which is absent of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice, who constantly says, “I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I can’t agree with your methods of direct action,” who believes that he can set the timetable for another man’s freedom.”

Back in 1963, who was really staying with Jesus? The while moderate pastors who were devoted to order, or those who were pushing for justice?

And how about today, 56 years later? Are we staying with Jesus, or staying with the way things have been?

The Palmer House offers great service and the very best in comfort, and if we stay with them, we will have a great time in Chicago. Nothing wrong with that; but let’s not forget about a far more important place to stay: with Jesus. Jesus invites us to “come and see” what he is up to, and he promises that if we stay with him, we will have an even more awesome and life-changing experience.

Jesus may take us to the Birmingham jail. Or to make or serve the homeless a meal. Or into a demonstration. Or onto a mission trip. Or, to a classroom, a neighbor’s house, a hospital, the county jail. Whatever.

But Jesus will take us somewhere because Jesus is a traveling man. So, where will you be staying tonight?