

“Where Are You Staying?”

Isaiah 49:1-7 & John 1:29-42

Rev. James Ramsey, January 19, 2014

“Where are you staying?”

This is always a good opening question when you meet someone new, especially at a place like Chautauqua Institution in Western New York. You are forever bumping into someone on Bestor Plaza – the heart of the Victorian education center and resort. Jo and I have taken Study Leave at Chautauqua many times over the years. Countless times



we have asked new friends, “Where are you staying.” Sometimes the answer would be the Athenaeum Hotel, one of the largest and oldest wooden structures in the world. But just as likely the answer might be the name of some Gingerbread Cottage, perhaps facing Miller Park...

Or it could be somewhere closer to the lake, some house or inn identified first by address, Hurst Avenue, North Lake Drive, Janes Avenue, Promenade Drive or Elm Lane. You know, the pink two story!



Over the years we have discovered great little streets and hidden cottages and experienced some grand adventures at Chautauqua just by asking the question, Where are you staying?

***This is an age-old question –
one that has led to discovery and adventure before.***

Take the disciples of John the Baptist:

John had met Jesus down by the river. And John had baptized him. But this Baptism was like no other John had done. "Here is the Lamb of God!" John had said of Jesus. "He ranks before me."



The day after John was telling his followers about the amazing encounter, I saw the Spirit descending like a dove, and it came to rest on this Jesus. At first I didn't recognize him, but God spoke to me and confirmed that this, indeed, is God's own Son.



A second day John was standing with two of his disciples, and he saw Jesus again, and could not remain silent, exclaiming, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!"

The significance of the exclamation must have finally registered with these two, because they left their teacher John and came after Jesus. Jesus turned and realized they were following him:

"What are you looking for?" Jesus' question could also be translated, "What do you want?"

The two didn't seem to know how to respond to Jesus. Truth is, not so different than many of us, they probably didn't really know what they were looking for, what they wanted. They just wanted to get close to Lamb of God. They were drawn to this one who "takes away the sin of the world."



Maybe they had a vague sense of what they wanted – the same as what most people want, then and now -- a comfortable lifestyle, good health,

children who are successful, security in our later years, to have some fun along the way, to make a difference. But they couldn't verbalize it, not to Jesus.

What do you want from Jesus? What are you looking for when you come to church?

Maybe we don't really want anything, at least not from Jesus. We're not really looking for a challenge, are we? We're not craving impossible ethical ideals. We certainly don't want talk about a cross, and giving up our life. Those disciples couldn't answer Jesus' question, so they asked their own:

"Rabbi, where are you staying?" Remember, such a question can lead to discovery and adventure. Ask this question of Jesus and that's just what you get – an invitation to the abundant life.



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, for the rest of their lives (vv. 38-39).

Jesus' Disciples are those who want to stay with him, follow him, wherever that stay may be and wherever it may take them.

We might first ask ourselves, "Where are you staying?" Am I stuck in some old habit, some tired complacency?



Have I remained where I am comfortable, content with the status quo, afraid to venture forth, to answer the call of Christ, to grow, to learn, change? Why do we stay in such places, when Jesus is near and offers abundant life? Why are we satisfied with less?

We are tempted to take what we perceive is the easy route.

We take the advice of our less adventurous friends, or the counsel of the fearful: better off to stay put. Change is the worst thing that could happen. Accept the dreary that you know, rather than risk something far worse.



I wonder where we are staying. Do we care where Jesus is staying? Are we willing to get up and find out. What do we say to Jesus' offer: "Come and see"...do we accept it? Will we get up out of our routines, and our complacencies, to venture forth with Jesus? And do we take this journey alone to find the Lord, or do we have the boldness and the care to tell others that "we have found the Christ"?



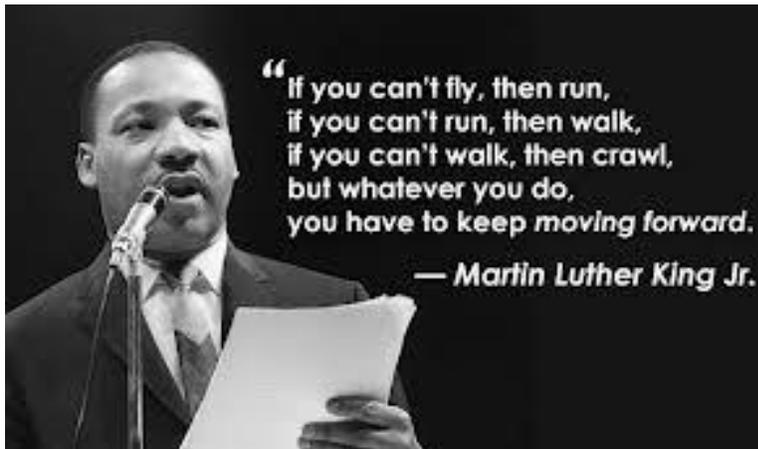
(I don't if this scene is in the new Lego movie – but there is a whole Lego line of biblical characters! – which enable children to act out Jesus' story.)

Andrew was one of the two who heard John speak and he went to find his brother, Simon, saying, "We have found the Messiah?"

I don't know about you, but I don't want to be left behind. I may be lazy sometimes. I like the comfort of my familiar routine – but I will not stay put while Jesus walks by. I want to know where Jesus is going, and what he has to say. I want to get up and see where he is staying!

Jesus says, "Come and see." He wants to show us the abundant life, a life of meaning and purpose and God-service.

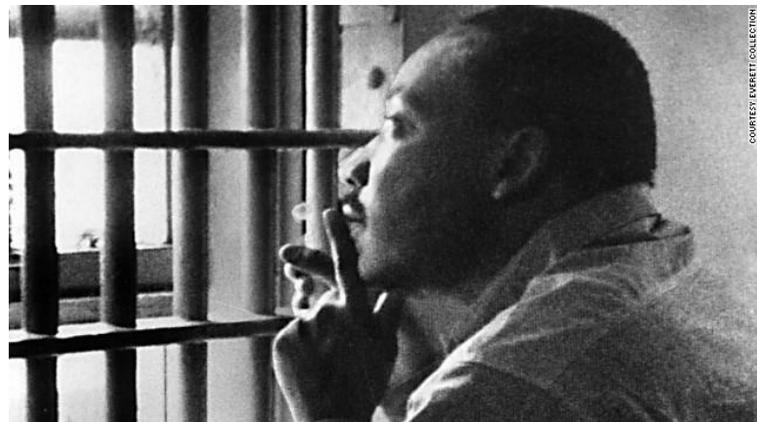
Take the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. ...



Since I went to seminary in Atlanta, Georgia, I got to know the life and the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. – he was born nearly the same day of the month of January as I was. King on the 15th, me on the 17th. Martin was surely one who was not

content with where he was staying and was eager to "come and see," where Jesus was headed. Martin had no idea where that would lead him. He didn't expect to visit a Birmingham jail.

On Good Friday afternoon in 1963, King was among 54 marchers who were arrested and thrown in jail for violating an injunction against "parading, demonstrating, boycotting, trespassing and picketing."



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, King wrote one of the most



important Christian documents of the civil rights movement: his "Letter from Birmingham Jail."

Surprisingly, this letter was addressed not to abusive police officers or racist politicians, but to a group of his white clergymen colleagues, ministers who were urging people to withdraw from the demonstrations, which they called "unwise and untimely."

King insisted that "we must use time creatively and forever realize that the time is always ripe to do right."

Back in 1963, who was staying comfortable...and who was asking Jesus, "Where are you staying?"

Jesus invites us to "come and see" what he is up to, and he promises that if we stay with him, if we follow -- we will have an abundant life.

Jesus may take us to the Birmingham jail. Or into a natural disaster.

To a nursing home or a food bank. To a homeless shelter or a service for handicapped people – Faithful Followers.

Jesus may lead us to a justice march or a mission trip –

Or, to a classroom, a community, a neighbor's house, a hospital.

Whatever.



But Jesus will take us somewhere, and if we aren't going anywhere, we may be with somebody, but we're not with Jesus, because Jesus is a traveling man.

So, where are you staying?