

**A Sermon from the Episcopal Parish of  
St. John the Evangelist in Hingham, Massachusetts**  
*Preached by the Rev. Timothy E. Schenck on January 19, 2020 (Epiphany 2, Year A)*

Have you ever been star struck? I remember one year when I was a kid, my father took me to Carnegie Hall for a concert that included a narration by the Pittsburgh Pirates Hall of Fame first baseman Willie Stargell. Being in the music business himself, he knew the conductor and I went that evening with the promise, or at least the hope, that I'd be able to go backstage afterwards to meet this baseball legend.

Now, I lived for baseball back then. I knew all the stats and all the players' uniform numbers. Being from Baltimore, I certainly wasn't a Pirates fan, a team that had beaten the Orioles in the World Series twice in the 1970s.

But still, I was so excited to meet a true superstar, and I even brought one of Willie Stargell's baseball cards, hoping that he might sign it. My brother still laughs at the sight of me standing before this giant of a man, staring up with eyes wide open, haltingly asking "Mr. Stargell" to please sign an autograph, and then watching me drop the card not once but twice. He graciously signed it for me, but from a dignity standpoint, this was not my finest moment.

The reality is, I was star struck. Meeting a literally larger-than-life sports legend got me all twisted up. It was exciting and thrilling and nerve-racking and reduced me to a tongue-tied little kid. Which, in fairness, I was.

Now, I'm not sure how it went for John the Baptist and Andrew and Peter when Jesus showed up on the banks of the Jordan River. John spots him first, and the Baptist has already been talking a lot about him. Stoking the Messiah hype machine. Building up expectations; testifying to the light; pointing to the one whose sandal he was unworthy to untie; talking about the one who would baptize not with water, but with the Holy Spirit and fire. And surely that would make anyone a bit anxious.

It makes sense then that Andrew and his companion — two of the Baptist's disciples who had been hanging on his every word about the Messiah's imminent arrival — would be star struck. Jesus arrives — they were probably staring at him, trying hard not to be too obvious about it — turns to them, and says, "What are you looking for?" Now, this question is more nuanced than it appears. The very first words Jesus speaks in John's gospel are better translated as, "What are you seeking?"

And that's a profound question. It gets to the core of what really matters. What are you seeking? What is your soul's desire? That's what Jesus wants to know. He didn't show up to make idle chit chat. Jesus didn't come into the world to talk about the weather. He gets right to the heart of the human condition. What are you seeking? This question transcends the practical and gets to the metaphysical. And it's a question worth pondering. What *are* you seeking? Hope or solace? Wholeness or inspiration? Meaning or joy? It's hard to find what you're looking for if you don't know what you're seeking.

But rather than looking inward and taking a moment for introspection, these two star struck disciples blurt out, "Rabbi, where are you staying?" Which at first glance sounds like a total and bizarre *non sequitur*; the verbal equivalent of me dropping my Willie Stargell baseball card. One of those moments where you say something and then later think to yourself, 'What was *that*?!

Yet at a deeper level, I don't think they were inquiring about Jesus' physical accommodations. They weren't asking whether he was staying at the Hilton or the Hyatt. In "Rabbi, where are you staying," they are, albeit awkwardly, expressing a desire to simply be in his presence; to be in the presence of God.

They are drawn to him, drawn to be with their Lord. What are you seeking? They are seeking nothing less than relationship with the divine.

Today marks the second Sunday in this Season after the Epiphany. And at one level, this whole season is about being star struck. On the Feast of the Epiphany itself the Magi are quite literally star struck. In following the Star of Bethlehem, they are fulfilling a deep yearning to be in the presence of God. But this theme continues throughout the weeks preceding Lent. The gospel readings we encounter — from Jesus' baptism last week to the calling of the disciples to various miracle stories and teachings — all point to the ways in which the divinity of Jesus is made manifest to the world. The power of Jesus Christ is revealed in word and deed and we're allowed to be, even encouraged to be, star struck.

In response to the disciples' question, Jesus simply says, "Come and see." And, these three words serve as a powerful invitational pull to experience the fullness of God's love. An invitation to be struck by the star that leads to relationship with Jesus Christ. To stand in the warm glow of a bright, shining light that never fades away.

Come and see and you will be both surprised and transformed. Come and see and you will find deep meaning and mystery. Come and see and your heart will overflow with peace and gratitude. Come and see and your soul will sing with praise and thanksgiving. That's what Jesus is offering to those first disciples and to us.

You see, this invitation to be in the presence of God isn't just for the privileged few. The invitation to experience the transforming power of faith is extended to all of us, and it's extended again and again and again. Come and see is an invitation to experience a God of love and justice and inclusion; a God who is accessible and inviting and compassionate. A God who is full of joyful surprises. All of the profound things we seek in this life that provide meaning and sustenance for the journey.

The piece Willie Stargell narrated that day was a newly commissioned work by an African-American composer named Joseph Schwanter titled "New Morning for the World." It blended orchestral music with the words of Dr. Martin Luther King. Combined with Stargell's voice and presence, it was a powerful piece that was unveiled to much acclaim. Embedded within it, with the strings slowly droning, were these words, which seem appropriate to end with as we celebrate Dr. King's legacy this weekend.

"Now is the time to make real the promise of democracy. Now is the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the sunlit path of racial justice. Now is the time to lift our nation from the quicksands of racial injustice to the solid rock of brotherhood. Now is the time to make justice a reality to all of God's children. We cannot walk alone. As we walk, we must make the pledge that we shall always march ahead. We cannot turn back. No, no, we are not satisfied and we will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream."

Come and see.