

How many times in your life have you thought to yourself, or said aloud to another person: "I have an idea!"?

"I have an idea: Let's order take-out!"

"I have an idea: let's start a band!"

"I have an idea: Let's get married!"

Ideas – those little sparks of inspiration, or epiphanies – are wonderful things, aren't they?

But an idea is really nothing by itself. An idea is only as good as the action that follows it.

Martin Luther King Jr. had an idea. He had a dream. But what if he'd never spoken it out loud? What if he'd never organized; never marched; never invited others to join him? Ideas don't really have meaning until they are put into word and flesh and movement.

The Israelites had an idea of a Messiah. They had a dream of salvation and freedom and wholeness. It was a part of their identity – and they trusted God's promise that one day this idea of salvation would become a reality.

And when Jesus appears on the scene, God's idea of salvation – God's love for the whole world – God's justice – is fully revealed. In Jesus, God's vision for creation is actually put into motion in the flesh.

But you know, when John the Baptist first announced that he had found the Messiah -- the first disciples were probably a little bit confused. *Their* idea of the Messiah may not have looked like this. This young man from Nazareth? This teacher? They start to follow him, but Jesus probably senses their bewilderment, and he turns and asks them: "What are you looking for?"

You notice, they don't really answer. But I think, in their hearts, they know what they're looking for. The same thing they've always been looking for -- they're looking for God. They're looking for the world to be turned! They're looking for freedom and salvation and justice and love.

They're looking for all the same things we are looking for, right?

We've come here to find God, too. We've come for forgiveness and acceptance. We've come to learn from Jesus so we can follow him. We've come to be inspired. We've come to be part of a community that knows us and helps us, and shares our dream for the world.

“What are you looking for?” Jesus asks us all. We’re looking for you, Jesus. We want to be with God. We want God to be with us. Isn’t that right?

The disciples’ question back to Jesus is: “Where are you staying?” And it really isn’t about location at all. They don’t want to know which hotel room is his. They want to know where he is going to be found in the world. They want to know where God is at work, so that they can be with him, and so they can be a part of it.

Jesus doesn’t give an easy answer. He gives a command: Come and see. Follow me. I’ll show you where God is at work in the world, Jesus says.

And he does.

He leads them to a wedding, where they see that God’s idea for the world is that scarcity be turned into abundance.

He leads them to a blind man, where they see that God intends healing and wholeness for people who have been excluded from communities.

He leads them to a woman at a well, who had been told over and over that her voice didn’t matter. And they learn that in God’s vision women do have a voice, in fact, all people have a voice.

He leads them to a field, where they see that when a community shares what little it has, there is enough for everyone to eat, and more.

And he leads them finally to a cross, where they see that God’s idea of love is self-sacrificing, forgiving, and eternal.

Over and over again, they become witnesses to God’s goodness, and are sent off to tell others about it.

You know, it’s really nice to have a seminarian around. Abby Cress is home on break, and being the good Greek student she is, she reminded me this week that the same word that is translated, “come,” is also translated as “go.” In the Greek language, the words “come” and “go” can’t be separated from each other.

So Jesus asks what we’re looking for. And his answer for us is that if we want to see God, we will need to go – out of our comfort zones, out of our own expectations, out of our own worldview – and that’s where we’ll find Jesus.

And this is useful for us today, especially as this congregation enters more deeply into our discernment process.

If you haven't heard about the discernment process yet, you can look in your bulletin or read our newsletter for more information. In short, our discernment is like those first disciples. We are a congregation that wants to know where God is at work in the world, and how we can be a part of it.

I don't know yet where this discernment is going. But I think if we're serious about finding out, we need to obey Jesus' command to go. Go out into the world and meet the hungry and sick and voiceless. Go out into the world and see what God is already doing. Get involved in our neighborhood. We need to have conversations with one another, and hear some new perspectives.

I don't know which of our ideas will be met by action. It might take some time before that becomes clear. But this dreaming stage is essential.

So honor your ideas. Listen to them. Pray about them. Write them on the newsprint downstairs. And talk about them! Because God is at work in our conversations and our relationships.

And this is not only about our congregational discernment. I think as disciples, we are always discerning where we are called to serve and act in the world.

Since the election, I keep hearing the same question repeatedly: "What are supposed to do now?"

What are we supposed to *do* with our country's division and fear? What are we supposed to do about the issues we face? I don't know exactly the answer, but I do know that we won't do any good sitting around complaining or worrying.

Jesus shows us a different way, and that is to get up and go. To come and see. To engage with the world constantly.

Our life with Jesus is about coming in and going out, and it's a cycle.

We come to the waters of baptism and receive God's Spirit. We go into the world, gifted and empowered by that same Spirit.

We come to this table to taste and see God's goodness. We go out, filled with the life of Christ, to share goodness and mercy with others.

We come to this community for help, for courage, for companionship. We go to be the body of Christ in our communities.

Martin Luther King Jr. knew that following Jesus required action, and he once said:
“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.”

So we will. We will go in peace, knowing Christ is with us. Thanks be to God. Amen.