

Sermon 1/18/2026 Color-courageous Discipleship

Martin Luther King Day

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John 1:29-42

The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by he exclaimed, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!" The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus.

Community, I pray for each of you today. I thank you for being here and for listening. God bless you.

Rev. Mark has asked me to preach on discipleship. And today, my invitation is simple: to revisit the image of Jesus so that we may invite others to follow him — by listening carefully to how discipleship begins in the Gospel of John. The other half of the sermon includes a reflection by Michelle Sanchez, author of the book *Color-courageous discipleship*.

May God guide my words.

(pause)

In today's text, John the Baptist is standing with two of his disciples. Not a crowd. Not many. Just two disciples who are being prepared — even gently released — to follow someone else when the time comes.

And then John sees Jesus walking by, and he says: "*Look. Here is the Lamb of God.*"

And in this Gospel, verbs matter.

John does not give a lecture to explain this. He gives them a command. *Look.*

The disciples *hear* him. And because they hear, they *follow*.

These are not passive actions. Verbs are movements. Discipleship does not begin with certainty or full understanding. It begins with attention — looking closely, listening carefully, and choosing to follow.

John knows what he is doing. He is not asking his disciples to stay with him. He is teaching them how to recognize Jesus when he walks by.

Look.
Hear.
Follow.

Remember, this gospel was written in Greek, in a common dialect. The word follow used in this passage is ἠκολούθησαν, found at least ninety times in the New Testament. This word is essential. It is the same word Jesus used to call the fisherman when they left their nets to follow him. It is also the word Jesus said to the one who wanted to follow him but had to bury his father first: “Follow me and let the dead bury their own dead”. What does it mean to follow in the time of instagram and social media?

Look.
Hear.
Follow.

I.

Community, looking, hearing, and following are deeply connected. And they lead us to an important question.

If discipleship begins with looking, hearing, and following — then *who are we really looking at?*

Because we cannot follow someone we have not truly seen. We cannot obey a voice we refuse to hear. And we cannot invite others into discipleship if we ourselves are unclear about who stands before us.

John names Jesus “*the Lamb of God.*” This is the first time this title appears in the Gospel. And it is not just a title — it is a relationship, it is intimate. There is courage in naming him. But this came out a previous experience. John invites his disciples to look after he has seen Jesus first. I wonder if this also happens to us. And that carries a responsibility.

And here is one of the paradoxes of this discipleship:
Some come to church to look and to hear — but not to follow.
Others want to follow — but without listening or looking carefully it's hard.

So this is my question: *who is the Jesus we are being invited to follow today?*

To help us reflect on that question, I invite you to listen now to the voice of Christian author and spiritual director Michelle Sanchez.

II.

When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, "What are you looking for?" They said to him, "Rabbi" (which translated means Teacher), "where are you staying?" He said to them, "Come and see." They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon.

In the scripture, we don't have many descriptions of Jesus. He just says: "come and see." Jesus is not the version painted by the Church of the Later Day Saints, his beard wasn't golden, or he wasn't soft pale, light skinned carpenter as depicted in French cathedrals. How does he look so that we may trust him to come and see? Because my mother taught me not to go with strangers. And my mother was right.

For Michelle Sanchez, in her book *Color-courageous Discipleship* she wants to invite us to see the real Jesus, to commit, "working to identify and dismantle racial fallacies and distortions wherever we encounter them." One that starts, with the figure of Jesus:

“a Middle Eastern Jew and a person of color, not a person of European descent

a member of a marginalized and oppressed minority under the Roman Empire

a refugee whose parents desperately fled to Egypt to save his life

a blue-collar worker trained as a carpenter, not an elite religious scholar

a convicted criminal, tried and sentenced to death according to the law”

This image of Jesus, does it feel more human? more based? Michelle Sanchez invites us to revisit the image of Jesus so that we have the courage to stand up for those who are marginalized, represented in the identities of Jesus. To name him as he is, not as we try to depict him in a French Cathedral. To come and see as he is.

III.

So, I was born in Colombia. When I came to the United States, this is the only time I have experienced being confused as a mediterranean. And I love to play with people trying to guess my nationality. The farthest I have ever gotten is Albania, Georgia, or even Cyprus. But when I answer, the game goes from expectation to delusion. Ah, Colombia. Maybe migration made us popular, like Venezuela or Cuba. Maybe, Sofia Vergara in Modern Family made us too popular. It is often, that I don't fit in their ideas of what a Colombian looks like. And I wonder if Jesus, as a man from the Mediterranean, from Palestine Judea, has been confused with a Brazilian.

I will mention a word that I want us to reflect without taking it out of context. A word rooted on the Civil Rights Movement. A word that Michelle Sanchez finds as an opportunity, not an obstacle for discipleship: Anti Racism. What does it mean anti racism as disciples of Jesus? It means that while we build a beloved community, intentionally, we are dismantling the structures that discriminate. Period. It means that, when I have to walk from Boston College to my church, I don't have to fear cars with blinded windows, the sound of sirens, the cars that look like SUVs or the cars that are suspiciously parked, everyday, in front of the church. Even if the fear is in my mind, I have to look to my back, or pass near the church of the Redeemer, just in case, always with my paperworks in my pocket because this system wasn't designed to welcome me.

Anti Racism for the time I was confused as the gardener of my home church, or the time someone from an online church told me: “Oh, Colombia! we used to talk about any disaster in the world, that, at least, it is not like Colombia!” But she wanted me to laugh. Community. While we love one unto another, we are intentionally dismantling the systems that have made people of color be hurt.

Systemic, yes, because Michelle Sanchez reminds us that discipleship must be grounded in reality. Honest about the world he would have walked through today. According to the Federal Reserve, we know that people of color are two times more likely to be unemployed, more likely to be disciplined in schools, and less likely to be recognized as gifted — even when their performance is the same. These are not isolated problems. They are patterns. Color-courageous discipleship invites me to continue my daily walk from Boston College to our Church, to face this system with courage and to have faith, following Jesus even if some mornings fear paralyzes me.

Community, beloved, this is not the sad or hopeless key to finish this sermon. This is an invitation to come and see that we follow a courageous

middle eastern, jewish descent, person of color. Michelle Sanchez reminds us that: “only as we recommit to the person of Jesus can our pursuit of antiracism become a discipleship journey. I want to encourage us: As we pursue antiracism for Jesus, let’s work not for **something** (antiracism) but for **someone**.”

IV.

We live in a world where, in the words of sociologist of religion and American professor, George Yancey: “The problem of racism is a problem of sin.” A sin that is not meant to attack or point out to individuals, but to structures and systems. Our personal story of following Jesus can be an invitation to dismantle this sin.

Jesus invites us to: “come and see”. This is an invitation to be the ones we have been waiting for to come and see what he has prepared for us. To be the disciples we have been praying for. To look rather than to follow clueless. To hear that which is most requisite and necessary as for us, as for those people of color outside our congregation.

Community, I want to name this with gratitude. Some among you have already been living this discipleship —walking alongside marginalized communities, offering time, resources, and presence. Your witness matters. I believe in the impact of the Phantoms, like the Phantom Fair celebrated last year, or the impact of sandwiches, like the ones we did for Capuchin Ministries. I believe we are already antiracist, and that this is not a finished job. Your faith is teaching us what following Jesus can look like here, now.

To change our shift from something to someone, Jesus, let us pray for the way we dream this church will become. For the church of the future, so that we look, hear, adapt, or transform to be his modern disciples, a church radically ready for the winds of change.

What does it look like the church you want to pass to the next generation? Probably, for me, a color-courageous church that looks for, hears from, and follows Jesus, our person of color and Lamb of God.

I ask you to join me and, if you want, repeat after me:

God. Our discipleship is to be ready
when the time comes to act.

Our discipleship is rooted in Jesus
and we are called to see it in our neighbor.

Our discipleship is to be courageous
when the time comes, to say yes.

Our discipleship is to follow you
and in that intention we pray,
Amen.

Pastoral Prayer

by Christina Rossetti p. 119

O Lord, who lovest the stranger, defend and nourish, we entreat Thee, all sojourners in strange lands and poor and helpless persons, that they may glorify Thee out of grateful hearts: and to such men and women as are tyrannical and oppressive give searchings of spirit and amendment of ways, that Thou mayest shew mercy on them also.

Amen.

Blessing (end of the service)

Community, this blessing comes from Charles de Foucauld, for these times.

Father, I abandon myself into your hands; do with me what you will.

Whatever you may do, I thank you.

I am ready for all, I accept all.

Let only your will be done in me, and in all your creatures.

I wish no more than this, O Lord.

Into your hands I commend my soul; I offer it to you with all the love of my heart, for I love you, Lord, and so need to give myself, to surrender myself into your hands, without reserve, and with boundless confidence, for you are my Father.

Amen.