

Come and See

A sermon by the Rev. Dr. Jon M. Fancher
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- John 1:35-50 Common English Bible ³⁵ The next day John was standing again with two of his disciples. ³⁶ When he saw Jesus walking along he said, "Look! The Lamb of God!" ³⁷ The two disciples heard what he said, and they followed Jesus. ³⁸ When Jesus turned and saw them following, he asked, "What are you looking for?" They said, "Rabbi (which is translated *Teacher*), where are you staying?" ³⁹ He replied, "Come and see." So they went and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon. ⁴⁰ One of the two disciples who heard what John said and followed Jesus was Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter. ⁴¹ He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated *Christ*). ⁴² He led him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon, son of John. You will be called Cephas" (which is translated *Peter*). ⁴³ The next day Jesus wanted to go into Galilee, and he found Philip. Jesus said to him, "Follow me." ⁴⁴ Philip was from Bethsaida, the hometown of Andrew and Peter. ⁴⁵ Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law and the Prophets: Jesus, Joseph's son, from Nazareth." ⁴⁶ Nathanael responded, "Can anything [good come out of Nazareth]?" Philip said, "Come and see." ⁴⁷ Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said about him, "Here is a genuine Israelite in whom there is no deceit." ⁴⁸ Nathanael asked him, "How do you know me?" Jesus answered, "Before Philip called you, I saw you under the fig tree." ⁴⁹ Nathanael replied, "Rabbi, you are God's Son. You are the king of Israel." ⁵⁰ Jesus answered, "Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these!"

Last week we remembered that Jesus chose to be baptized as a way of signaling the start of a new chapter in his life. At the age of thirty he set down the tools of the carpentry trade. He left behind the relative comforts of home, walking out into the desert, down to the river, then out to villages and towns scattered across the hills and valleys and plains of Judea and the Galilee.

Jesus would meet people where they were or receive people when they came to him. In his vivid little stories set in everyday settings, and in his stirring, insightful reflections on sacred scripture, Jesus presented people with the opportunity to change their lives. He invited them to change from being focused largely on themselves. He invited them to welcome becoming vessels through which God's love was spread to their families, to the community, the country, the world.

Jesus recruited helpers for this campaign, this ministry. We're familiar with the stories in the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke when Jesus called people to become his disciples, students, helpers. He'd walk down by the shore of the Sea of Galilee, see some fishermen offshore casting their nets into the water, or others ashore mending the

nets for tomorrow's work. He'd call out, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers... catching people!"¹ That's what we hear in the other gospels.

But today we heard from John's gospel. The Fourth Gospel is different from the other three. And in John's gospel Jesus didn't so much go out recruiting people to be his disciples. Instead, they were searching for God's chosen one — the one to save them that scripture had long ago anticipated! — and they came across Jesus. They encountered the one who would bring God's ways to earth.

And so it was that Philip, after encountering Jesus, offered the invitation that he had heard, and that Peter had heard, and that Andrew and the other disciple had heard from Jesus. "Come and see."

"Come and see."

Right now that doesn't seem very practical, does it?

Even if we wanted to share with a sibling or a neighbor or a coworker or friend what knowing Jesus means to us, even if we did say to them, "Come and see," where would we want them to come with us? To church? Into our home? A frustrating and scary pandemic has made it the safe thing to do to stay away from our beloved church home for the time being, and we're not allowing others into our homes if they're not in our "safety bubble."

But realize this: when Jesus invited people to "Come and see," he wasn't inviting them to a particular place. Jesus invites us to come to him. To get to know him. To learn from him. To follow him. To emulate his example. To love with his unconditional love and welcome with his barrier-breaking acceptance.

When we "come and see" Jesus, here's what we find in him that speaks to what our world needs today.

- Jesus recognized the inherent worth in all people, as he illustrated in the Parable of the Final Judgment in Matthew Chapter 25. That's where he said, "Whatever you did for the least of these my sisters and brothers, it is as though you did that for me."
- Jesus showed respect to women even though that wasn't the cultural norm in that time and place. John Chapter 4 tells us of a time when Jesus struck up a life-changing conversation with a woman drawing water at a well, even though that society of long ago and far away frowned upon men speaking to women who were strangers to them.
- Jesus would engage with people who were looked down upon by most in his society. Luke Chapter 19 offers the story of Jesus telling Zacchaeus to get ready because Jesus was going to his house for a visit. What was remarkable about that

¹ See Matthew 4:19

was that Zacchaeus collected taxes for the Romans who were occupying and controlling Palestine at that time – and his collusion with the enemy made Zacchaeus a despised person in the eyes of most Palestinian Jews. But Jesus befriended him anyway.

- Jesus didn't turn away from people with serious or chronic physical or mental illness. He brought healing to a man unable to walk (Mark 2:9-12), and to another man's blindness (John 9:6-7). He brought healing to a woman who had endured hemorrhaging issues for twelve years (Matthew 9:20-22), and to a boy who had been tormented by seizures (Mt. 17:14-21).
- Jesus identified with people burdened by poverty, as we saw when he sent out his disciples without money or valuables so they could relate to those they ministered to (Matthew 9:5-10).
- Jesus respected people from other lands and cultures, as we saw in his healing of the daughter of a woman who was a foreigner and wasn't Jewish (Mk. 7:24-30).
- Jesus saw the possibility of redemption in people engaging in disreputable behavior. Remember the story in the eighth chapter of the Gospel of John of the crowd ready to stone a woman caught in adultery? Jesus challenged them, "You know who should throw the first stone? The one of you who has never sinned." He believed that she deserved the chance to change her ways.
- Jesus gave the gift of time and attention to young folk and children. On one occasion when his disciples behaved like bodyguards trying to keep parents and children from bothering their teacher, Jesus said, "Let the children come to me and do not hinder them" (Mt. 19:14).

When we encounter Jesus, when we respond to his invitation to "Come and see," what we receive is God's blessing of a life based on acceptance, openness, kindness, forgiveness, encouragement.

Jesus says to you, "Come and see how to embody God's grace and love in your life." Jesus says to you, "Come and see how you can extend my compassion, how you can reach out with loving acceptance, how you can humbly serve the needs of others."

Yes, let us "come and see" Let us discover how to make his way our way in this world. Amen.