

COME AND SEE

1 Samuel 3:1-10, OT p. 247
John 1:35-51, NT p. 92

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We had all these readers up here as disciples making life-changing decisions, but no one actually said very much, except Jesus at the end. I wonder if the men who decided to follow Jesus really did it that quickly. It's like going on a blind date and deciding right then to get married and spend the rest of your lives together. I think something else was going on. Jesus must have had a compelling presence, or maybe a glowing reputation. Or it could be that the Spirit of God was already at work in those future disciples, preparing them to hear the invitation, "Come and see."

It's a simple invitation, "come and see." Jesus said it to potential disciples. Philip said it to his friend Nathanael. The verb "to see" has multiple levels of meaning. When John's two disciples followed Jesus and asked where he was staying, did they just go with him to his campsite along the Jordan River or his room in a small village nearby? Or did Jesus' invitation to "come and see" reveal where he was really staying, abiding in God?

After Andrew comes and sees, he invites his brother Simon to meet Jesus, and for once, Simon doesn't have anything to say. He just receives a new name, Peter, the Rock, because Jesus sees something in him.

The next day, Jesus sees in Nathanael a man of integrity, even before they meet. This man Jesus called a "true Israelite" was sitting under a fig tree. I just found out this week that even the fig tree can have more than one meaning. That is where rabbis and their students might sit to study Torah, the law of Moses. Maybe Nathanael was studying the word of the Lord as he sat under the fig tree. Maybe he always did his best to follow the teaching of Moses. In Nathanael Jesus saw integrity and faithfulness. In Jesus, Nathanael saw "the Son of God, the King of Israel." And Jesus assured him and the others gathered around that they would see greater things than these. They would see and understand that Jesus is, like Jacob's ladder, the stairway to heaven.

Not everyone would see that, of course, and so there would be opposition, and conflict with the religious leaders. Some who started to follow Jesus would give up when it became inconvenient. But enough would continue with him so that after the resurrection, they too could invite others to “come and see.”

So what do you see in Jesus? Even some people who don't call themselves Christian regard the historical Jesus as a great teacher. Gandhi, for instance, studied the Gospels for clues about nonviolence, what does it mean to turn the other cheek, and learned how to use peaceful means to bring independence to India. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., a Baptist preacher, studied Gandhi's methods, as well as the New Testament, and used nonviolent methods to confront unjust laws and call the whole country to live up to its promise of liberty and justice for all. We celebrate King's courageous work this week. Most of us remember Jesus' teaching of the greatest commandments, “Love God with all that you are, and love your neighbor as yourself.” And I think we try, at least much of the time, to do that. Jesus is our teacher, and also the moral and ethical inspiration for the way we live our own lives.

But Jesus is more than that. Many of us understand those other titles people gave him, we heard several just in this one reading. We recognize Jesus as the one who sacrificed himself as our Savior, and we experience his forgiving, liberating love. We call Jesus “A Lord,” the one who has the strength to defend us from evil and also has the authority to send us out to do God's work. And we believe that Jesus Christ reveals God to us, for in him we see what God is like.

How did you first hear the invitation to “come and see”? “Maybe it was in your family, with your mother teaching you a bedtime prayer, or your father reading a Bible story. Maybe it was at Sunday School, where you first learned to sing “Jesus Loves Me.” Maybe you heard the invitation when a friend said, “Let's go to youth group. There might be some cute girls.” And you found much more. Maybe you heard the invitation in a time of crisis when someone began to pray with you. Some people see God in the beauty of nature or music or the visual arts, or in the poetry of the Psalms.

Maybe, like Samuel, you heard something strange and completely unexpected that you had to explore.

When we hear that invitation, it's OK to question it. Nathanael did. He didn't pretend to believe that Jesus was the Messiah just because Philip said so. He began to dismiss his friend's invitation with a cynical remark, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?", but then to be fair, he gave Jesus a chance. He came, and discovered that before he saw Jesus for the first time, Jesus had already seen him for who he was inside. Something about Jesus seeing and knowing him helped him see who Jesus was B Son of God.

The invitation is simple. What happens next may be a surprise. Sometimes through Jesus we see the glory of God. That is, we are astounded by God's love, God's forgiveness, God's sheer overwhelming presence. That doesn't happen often, but it could. We may experience an inner peace, as trust in God replaces fear of the unknown or the need to control our own lives. In the presence of Christ, we often realize that we need to make some changes in priorities and habits.

When we come and see, we may be surprised to discover that God has already seen us. God knows our needs, and provides ways for those needs to be filled. Our potential is also obvious to God, and the Spirit shows us how to live into the gifts we have been given to share.

Sometimes we are challenged by the voice of God, as Samuel was. He was afraid to tell Eli, because God's message was about Eli, whose sons were abusing their priestly office. The Lord would give up on Eli and his sons, and begin to speak through Samuel, young as he was. There are times when God calls us to challenge a person we care about, someone who is on a self-destructive path. It is not easy to confront a family member about the use of drugs or alcohol, or about their over-work or lack of responsibility, but there are times when this might be our God-given task.

Because God knows us, we might be challenged by the Spirit to examine our own assumptions and beliefs, as we read Scripture, in discussion with one another, as we see what is happening in the world around us. When we express and listen, gently and non-defensively, to different perspectives,

we can grow together as the spiritual body of Christ, the church.

“Come and see.” Once we have heard the call, we can pass that invitation on to others. We can certainly remember these simple words and say them to nearly anyone we know. But whether or not we speak, our lives are continually inviting people to come and see. What do we hope people see in our lives, and in our church, because who we are will be what others see of Jesus. I hope people see us living and working together as forgiven and forgiving children of God. I hope they see that although we have a wide range of opinions and deeply held beliefs, differences are respected and questions are welcome. I hope they see us reaching out in love to serve one another and those outside these walls, because we do. And I hope they see, I hope we all see, the love of God active among us.

God calls us again and again to come and see. If you haven’t seriously considered the call of Jesus Christ, or if it’s been a long time since you knew the touch of the Spirit, this might be a good time to invite God back into your life. May we all rededicate ourselves as disciples, as those who have answered the call of Jesus to “Come and see.”

Let us pray. Holy, welcoming God, you know us as we are, and as we can become. May we seek to follow Christ always, as we are led by your Spirit. In the name of Jesus Christ, who has revealed your love to us, Amen.