

Come and See
John 1:35-51
January 28, 2018

Rev. Nancy F. Dolan
First Presbyterian Church
Lake Forest, Illinois

Our scripture lessons for last week and today are two of the "call" texts of the Bible; the calling of the first disciples. All of the four gospels move the disciples from observers to participants. From stunned awe of this miraculous birth, God entering the world in flesh, to action, to following; what we call today discipleship. The shift represented in these stories, also invites us to move, from observing to following. And these call stories force the question: are we going to be disciples or not?

Last week Sean preached from the Gospel of Mark's interpretation of the call of the disciples, and Jesus' invitation to "follow me." This week, we hear the same story as interpreted by John's gospel. Listen for God's Word to you this morning: John 1:35-51.

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. 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. One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his brother Simon and said to him, 'We have found the Messiah' (which is translated Anointed). He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, 'You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas' (which is translated Peter).

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, 'Follow me.' Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter.

Philip found Nathanael and said to him, 'We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth.' Nathanael said to him, 'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?' Philip said to him, 'Come and see.' When Jesus saw Nathanael coming towards him, he said of him, 'Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!' Nathanael asked him, 'Where did you come to know me?' Jesus answered, 'I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.' Nathanael replied, 'Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!' Jesus answered, 'Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these.' And he said to him, 'Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.'

This is the Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

I've mentioned to some of you my love of Cape Cod. It's one of my slices of heaven on earth, and I have warm memories across my whole life of vacations on the Cape. My family has always been bay-side people, preferring to stay on Cape Cod bay rather than the ocean side. We love the calm and warmer waters, the quiet pace, the sunsets over the bay...but we especially love the sand bars. At low tide the sand bars go out for miles, as far as you can see.

When we're there, our family considers our days around the tide schedule, so we can plan our walk out on the sand bars. (And you do have to plan for it, because if you start too late you're liable to get stuck out there when the tide rolls in!) This walk is always an adventure. Because as the waters recede a whole new world is revealed – life hidden under the waters, activity missing from your eyes when you are floating on the surface. You

find yourself walking with your head down so as not miss anything. We tend to spread out a little on our walks. Close enough to talk, but far enough so that each of us keeps a unique perspective. It's not long on those walks before someone calls, "Look!" "You guys!" "Come over here – look at this!" Invariably it's something interesting; small creatures in a mini tide pool, a teeny tiny sand crab burrowing or scurrying, or, if we're lucky, evidence of a giant horseshoe crab – now that's a big day! My oldest brother is great at finding those. He's always the first to catch the trail, then he drops to his knees and digs like a mad man, and more likely than not victoriously uncovers the prehistoric creature. (Fun fact: horseshoe crabs are one of the oldest animals on the planet – likely dating 200 million years before dinosaurs!)

Of course, we rush over to check it out, to share in the excitement, just like all of our great discoveries, together taking in with awe this creature, or whatever it is the finder wants to show us. "You guys, come look!" It's an invitation to share in the discovery, born out of the excitement of not only what was discovered, but also the yearning to share it with others.

This is this invitation into discipleship that we hear this morning; a compelling, "you guys, come look!" invitation that prompts one to step away from the sidelines and come along, and see.

The followers in this story are actually disciples of John the baptizer, standing with John when he points out Jesus – "Hey, there goes the Lamb of God!" This seems like an invitation too good to pass up so they begin to follow when Jesus asks them, "What are you looking for?" I'm guessing they don't even know. I mean if you find yourself walking behind God in the flesh, how can you know what to expect? So, caught off-guard with the question, they ask him, "Where are you staying?" Ha! I love it. "*Where are you staying?*" Here is God in flesh and you ask him where he's staying?! Like a

tongue-tied teen meeting somebody like Beyonce and saying, "Umm, ah, where are you staying?"

But Jesus doesn't laugh like me, he says, "Come and see!" Do we really think Jesus was inviting them to see his Motel 6 accommodations? I think not! The text says that they went with Jesus and remained there. Because it was the *experience of relationship* with Jesus they were invited to "see". Come be with me, and let's see together, was the invitation.

The scene goes on with another "come and see" invitation. The next day, Jesus invited Philip to follow him. Philip doesn't follow immediately, but first finds Nathanael, telling him that holy cow, he's found the Son of God – the One whom Moses said to expect. Nathanael is completely skeptical. You've got to be kidding. From Nazareth? But Philip says, "*Come and see.*" Come with me, come and experience this with me. Let's go look.

Come and see. It's a two-step decision in this lesson; a decision to not only follow, but to also see. Those are essential elements of this call story, following and seeing. This not blind following, when you go not really paying attention or participating. It's an eyes-wide-open following, with expectation that you'll discover something – something you don't want to miss. And it's a following *together*; not just about what you'll see, but what you'll experience in relationship. Sometimes you'll see something big and spectacular like a horseshoe crab, and sometimes it's something you've seen time and time again, a sand crab, or a shell. But it all looks different with others, and the experience is different because it's shared. It's not just what you see, it's that you saw it together. And Jesus invites us to come with him, and see together; because seeing with Jesus is seeing with a whole new set of eyes.

'Come and see' discipleship starts with a decision. The decision not to watch from afar, which we are all inclined to do. Like going to worship and

not accepting for ourselves the grace promised and the assurance proclaimed. Or, like reading the Bible but closing minds so that it doesn't change our way of thinking. Or, like going through the motions of our traditions because that's what we've always done but not risking a personal experience of faith. This lesson reminds us that we are invited to step a little deeper – to decide to come and see – if we're going to be disciples.

But what we don't have to decide to do, is leave our doubts at the door. Nathanael is skeptical. "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" he asks. The question reflects his stereotypes, doubts, perhaps his need to have the answers and to control the outcomes...we can identify with all of that because that's us too. But that needn't keep us from following and it doesn't Nathanael. Jesus seems to pick random people, often with colorful pasts, with responses ranging from enthusiasm to relative disinterest to complete rejection. And yet he calls us all to *follow*. Philip doesn't say to Nathanael, "Come and *believe*," or "come convinced," he says, "Come and see!" In other words, Jesus is going to do the heavy lifting. Just step into the relationship and look. Then you'll see."

Because, my friends, here's what happens when we decide to follow and see. When we step further into this relationship, when we decide not to be bystanders, when we "come and see" with all our doubts, and questions, shortcomings, we DO see. We start to recognize God's grace and love around us, even when all evidence might point to the contrary. We begin to acknowledge and experience God's acts of redemption and renewal, even when hope was lost. And as we're marveling at all of that, then Jesus says, "You're about to see greater things than these!"

Are we going to be disciples or not? Are we going to walk the sandbar and be told there's cool stuff out there, but not bother to go see? Or are we

going to follow together and see what Jesus wants to show us? We are at a wonderful time in the life of our church to accept the invitation to "Come and See". So often in life, when everything is rolling along smoothly, we miss what *God's* doing. We might see what *we're* doing, but we're not necessarily looking to what God is doing. But when things get challenging, like they've been for us, when we have to rely on God because frankly, we realize we've run out of other options, then we are more likely to seek and see God.

This is such a time in the broader church today. We were on a roll in the 50s and 60s, even 70s – growing by our sheer presence in the community. Build it and they will come. We built human institutions, fueled by, we thought, human effort. And when our memberships started declining we just kept pouring in more human effort. If we work harder, they will come. If we have more programs, they will come. If we build a gymnasium, they will come.

But it's too easy for that invitation to be an invitation to come and see US, rather than Jesus! But the invitation into discipleship is not to showcase human feats, but to come and encounter God in Christ. Because *that's* when the transformation happens. When we come and see Jesus, who knows us and sees us - whether under the fig tree like Nathanael, or in our cars, or at our desks, or in the quiet of our homes - when we dwell together with Christ, we see differently. With a new set of eyes.

We have to do that now! We have to decide we are going to be disciples, to make the choice to "come and see" what God is up to! It is the time, in the life of our own church, and in the life of the church in the world.

As we stop to reflect today on where we are at First Pres, and where we are going in the new year, I invite you to come and see what God is up to. As you listen to the reports, and look over your written Annual Report, come and

see how God breathing new life into our ministries. Come and sense the possibilities. And come and see what God might be wanting to show us.

I look in these pages (of the Annual Report) and see the transformation possible when we follow together, when we encounter God in relationship – relationships over tables, at Festivals, over balance sheets, and in Bible studies. But I know that God is calling us to so much more. The world is so far from what it should be in God's eyes. And so are we. Through this time of study, we are sensing God calling us to come and see the needs around us in new ways – needs not being met by the church today. Needs both among us and outside our walls. I imagine God saying to us, "Come and see what breaks my heart in your community, and in your family of faith. Come and see where I am already at work, where you can join me. Come and see the transformation possible when we do this together."

This invitation is more important than ever. Are we going to be disciples or not? Are we going to decide to follow and see, and invite others to come with us?

Let's go and see together. Let's look under the surface and go deeper. Not from the sidelines, but stepping toward Jesus and into the promise that we will see things "greater than these", emboldened by Christ's promise that we will *do* things greater than what we have ever done before.

Let's go and see!