

Pastor Jon's Sermon on January 17, 2021 based on the calling of Philip and Nathanael

Text: John 1:43-51

Who has invited you to "Come and See" Jesus?

As you think back through your life, who are some people that said "come and see" for you to meet Jesus? I can think of my parents, grandparents, Sunday School teachers, pastors, and friends who invited me to church or into learning about Jesus. In college, I recall the experiences of worship at the Lutheran Campus Ministry at UW-Eau Claire. Pastor Don's sermons seemed to hit me right between the eyes every week as a self-centered college student. He ushered me into a place where I could see Jesus for myself, convict me of my need for cross, and make me hungry to learn more about Jesus.

While in college, I recall two experiences that deepened my faith. A friend invited me to a Christian retreat in the Boundary Waters in the winter. There I snowshoed, played broom ball, and sat around the fire and did Bible Study as a young adult. During the snowshoe hike, the adult leader had us sit on the snowy floor of the forest and look and listen for God. In the stillness of fresh snow, like the still small voice of God to Elijah in the cave, I had a moment where I was in awe of God's creation and verbalized it to the group.

The second experience is when I went on an alternative spring break trip to Washington D.C. where I served meals to the homeless, read books and played music with inner city children, and learned how to navigate public transportation in a big city. I remember on our bus trip home to UW Eau Claire, I felt a call to serve others. All this happened because someone took the time to invite me to come and see for myself. Jesus met me when I served others.

After reading our Gospel for the week, I am reminded of all the Philips in my life. Philip was called by Jesus in Galilee to "Follow him." Then Philip went to his friend, Nathanael and said, "We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth."

I get the sense that Philip was waiting for this moment most of his life. He, along with many Jewish People, were waiting for the long-promised Messiah they read and heard about in scripture. Philip was excited to tell Nathanael.

But Nathanael was a skeptic. He got stuck on the word Nazareth. “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Nazareth was a small backwater town in Israel. It had no major significance in the Old Testament. Nathanael was not convinced. Philip, simply responded, “Come and see.” He does not try to convince or cajole Nathanael. He doesn’t even try to answer Nathanael’s question. He simply invites Nathanael to come and see for himself, and Nathanael came.

As a Lutheran, this fits with how we understand of how we come to faith. In Luther’s explanation of the 3rd article of the Apostle’s creed in the Small Catechism, faith or belief is a gift of the Holy Spirit through hearing the Gospel... the good news of Jesus Christ. I believe that by my own reason or understanding I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him, but instead the Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel, enlightened me with gifts, made me holy and kept me in the true faith. Our job as Christians is not to force religion down someone’s throat, but to invite others into an encounter with Jesus... to have them hear the good news of Jesus. The Holy Spirit has to do the rest.

Like Mother Teresa did with a woman who visited her mission.

A rich donor was visiting Calcutta and met Mother Teresa. She pulled out her checkbook and said “How can I help you in your work?” Mother Teresa pressed the checkbook back into the woman’s purse, took her by the hand and said, “Come and see.” She led the woman into an impoverished barrio, and found a hungry, frail child. “Care for her.” The woman took the child in her lap, wiped her brow, and fed her. Mother Teresa said “When we care for a child, we are caring for Jesus. When we love the unloved, we are loving Jesus.”

Nathanael did get to meet Jesus face to face.

When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, “Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!”⁴⁸ Nathanael asked

him, “Where did you get to know me?” Jesus answered, “I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.”⁴⁹ Nathanael replied, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!”

Jesus already knew Nathanael before they met. Jesus saw Nathanael under a fig tree. Jesus knew Nathanael was a truth teller.

All of our lessons this week reveal how God knows us all intimately already... the good and the bad and the ugly in us... and yet God still loves us and claims us as God’s very own. In Psalm 139, we hear that God knits us together in our mother’s womb. That we are fearfully and wonderfully made. We will make daily mistakes, you will face times in life when you want to give up, but know that God made you for a purpose, and daily forgives your sins.

As Christians we are called to invite others into the faith. Think about it, who have you invited lately? It is hard to really connect with people when we are physically distancing. Have you taken this call by Jesus to go make disciples in Matthew 28 seriously, or do you think someone else will do it?

And how do you make disciples? Did you ever think about that? I believe it is through relationship and accompaniment. It is through your stories of how God is working in your life. Your testimony. Through everyday life, it’s how you treat people, how you talk about others, how you stand up for justice when called. Like MLK as we honor him this week, his faith informed his action. I love the saying, “Preach the Gospel at all times, if necessary, use words.” Or another one I like, “Sometimes you are the only Bible anyone will read.”

By our words and actions, may we attract others to “come and see” for themselves.

Amen