

“Come and See”

**Pastor Dave Carlson
First Presbyterian Church
Sunday, January 26, 2014**

New Testament Lesson: John 1:35-51

Old Testament lesson: Psalm 139:1-6, 13-14

Last Sunday we saw that Jesus Christ is the one who cannot be fully known, on at least this side of the cross. We did come to see, however, that whatever else he is – all that’s known and unknown about him – Jesus is the incarnation of God’s love for us and for all creation. “For God so loved the world that he sent his only son.”

This Sunday, Jesus calls to us from across the eons of time and says, “Come and see.” Come and see what it is to be a follower of Christ.

When you first encountered Jesus, what was that like? For me, one of my earlier encounters with Jesus in my heart and soul, as an adult, was through a Day-Glo poster on the wall of my college dorm room. The poster was of Jesus reaching out to Peter as he sank into the waves. Peter had just stepped out of the boat, because Jesus (in Matthew 14:29) bids him, come. And there he stands, walking on water, as he makes his way toward Jesus. Then something changes. Peter gets frightened or distracted by the storm all around him and begins to sink. And that’s when Jesus reaches out and raises Peter up to safety.

Jesus: the one who brings us to safety when we are drowning in the world all around us – that’s what it was like in one of my earlier encounters with Jesus. And I expect that for you, Jesus at some point reached out in a similar way – bringing you to safety amid the storm-tossed waters of life.

Who is this Jesus that reaches out to us? Who is this Man of Nazareth who bids us, come and see? Well if our earlier encounters of Jesus hold true, Jesus is the one who saves us in times of trouble.

But, looking at the earliest followers of Jesus, when they first encountered him, we see that Jesus is much more than a rescuer. As John tells it, who Jesus is – for any of us – depends on where we are in our faith life at any given moment. In our New Testament Lesson this morning, John the Baptizer sees Jesus as “the Lamb of God” who takes away the sin of the world. And he points to him and says, “Look ...!” Two of John’s disciples see this and they follow Jesus. And the first thing that Jesus does is ask them a question: “What are you looking for?” Where are you in your faith life?

It’s a question worth asking today. What are you looking for, from Jesus – a savior, a teacher, someone to turn your life around, a guide; maybe ultimate

truth, knowledge of yourself and your calling in life, or how about a protector, someone to rule over the world and keep everything safe and sound? Turns out, Jesus is all of these things.

As each of the four disciples from today's reading – Andrew, Peter, Philip and Nathanael – as each one comes to Jesus, each decides to follow based on a different faith statement about who Jesus is.

Following Jesus is an act of faith, and thus, it's an act of discovery. When we follow Jesus, we end up learning as much about ourselves as we do about Jesus – maybe more – because Jesus sees beyond our current circumstances.

It's like the mother of two young children who ran into an old friend at the grocery store. The friend looks at the little ones and says, "Such darling boys! So how old are they?" "The doctor is 3," the mother says as she gazes off into the future, "and the lawyer is 2."

Jesus can see beyond our current circumstances because he knows us better than we know ourselves. And as such, Jesus is the best one we can turn to to guide us forward and lead us onward.

We see this when the disciples ask him, "Where are you staying?" And Jesus says to them, "Come and see; Come let, let me guide you." And of course, we want to know to where, where is Jesus guiding us?

But following Jesus is not about the destination or endpoint. It's about the journey, a journey with Jesus as the host who provides us safe lodging along the way. John tells us the "disciples came and saw where (Jesus) was staying, and they remained with him...." Jesus is the host who gives us a safe place to be. And once we settle down with Jesus as our guide and our host through life, a strange thing happens. In John's gospel, this thing that happens is marked by the telling of time, where John says, "It was about four o'clock in the afternoon."

What happens when we settle down with Jesus to guide us through life is we change. A new age begins, time begins anew. From this point forward – from four o'clock in the afternoon onward for those earliest disciples – their lives are forever changed. They are now on a journey of discovery, with Jesus as their guide.

And it all began with John pointing two of his followers to Jesus. One of them is named Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter. Immediately, Andrew finds his brother Simon and says to him, "'We have found the Messiah' (which is translated Anointed)."

This is a new revelation about of who Jesus is, the anointed one of God. In fact, the word Messiah – or Anointed One or Chosen One – appears only here in the New Testament.

Simon Peter's ability to see Jesus as the chosen one of God has as much to do with who Simon is as it does with who Jesus is. Because Simon, in being given the name Peter, is Jesus' chosen one. Jesus looks at Simon and says, "You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas' (which is translated Peter)," which in Aramaic means "rock." Peter is the rock on which Jesus builds his church. Peter is chosen by Jesus for a special role.

Following Jesus means discovering a new identity for ourselves, discovering our role in building up the church and sharing the faith. You may not be sure right now what your particular role is or that you have faith enough to discover it and accept it, but that's OK. Remember, Jesus is out ahead of us, to show the way. That's why Jesus bids us come and see. I mean just look at Philip and Nathanael. "The next day," says John, "Jesus decided to go to Galilee. (There) he found Philip and said to him, 'Follow me.'" Hearing this, Philip goes and finds Nathanael and says, "Come and see," come and see who we have found, Jesus of Nazareth, who Philip sees as the fulfillment of the law of Moses and the words of the prophets. But Nathaniel, he's a little bit skeptical, saying, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"

Here we see that even one who is skeptical or whose faith is wavering may come to Jesus, because Jesus knows our skepticism. Jesus knows our doubts. Jesus knows that we push back. Jesus knows us better than we know ourselves. Knowing Jesus is not just an act of discovery. It is also an act of self knowledge. In Jesus, we come to know ourselves in new and surprising ways. Jesus looks into the eyes of Nathanael and says, "Here is truly and Israelite in whom there is no deceit!" Jesus doesn't see Nathanael only for his skepticism. Jesus sees him for his honesty. Nathanael doesn't pretend when it comes to knowing Jesus. He lays it all out there – his doubts and fears and uncertainty. And Jesus accepts him – accepts us – just the way we are. Jesus doesn't ask us to be something we're not. All he asks us to do is to accept ourselves as we are and to trust him to show us what we can become. When Nathanael encounters Jesus, he asks Jesus, "Where did you come to know me," and Jesus answers, "I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you."

And so it is with us. Jesus is the one who is out ahead of us, anticipating our needs, leading us onward to the fulfillment of our God-given potential. Just as Jesus cannot be fully known and contained, our potential as followers of Christ cannot be fully known or contained. It can only be discovered, moment by moment, situation by situation. In one circumstance we may be an instrument of God's comfort and care; in another, the purveyor of God's abundance, giving to those in need; and in yet another, we may be the teacher and guide for someone else, leading that person deeper in the faith.

It matters little how we see ourselves at any one moment in time. What truly matters is that we see ourselves at all times as followers of Jesus. As followers of Jesus, our ultimate calling is not one of destination, but one of discovery. “Come and see;” when Jesus calls to us and says, “Come and see,” it is not only Jesus who we are to discover, it is ourselves, discovering ourselves as followers of Christ.

So, look at yourself and your relationship with Jesus, and ask yourself what is it that Jesus might be leading you to discover about yourself, about your highest potential. What might Jesus have in store for us as individuals when he bids us , when he bids you come and see. Amen.

Pastoral prayer

O gracious God, who calls each of us to ministry, we give you thanks that you empower us with all that we need ... and yet we admit our complacency and doubt.

Can we really be the ones on which you are building your church? Are we really “gifted enough” for the task to which you call us?

Do our efforts have any effect whatsoever, given the reality of despair and grief in our world, and in our own hearts?

At the core of our being, we admit to being haunted, sometimes, by Nathanael’s question: Can anything good come out of Nazareth? Are the stories really true? Are you real? Are you there? Are you who you say you are?

In this cacophony of questions, the answer comes simply: “Follow me. Come and see.” O Lord, help us to follow. Give us eyes to see through the fog of our endless questioning and paralyzing doubt.

Lead us to a place beyond questions, where we can live in trust and faith. Lead us as your disciples, disciples who know you *and* are ever discovering what it is to know you more deeply – disciples joined in faith and joined in prayer, joined in praying now the prayer that you taught us, saying:

Our Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name;
Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread; And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from evil,
For thine is the Kingdom and the Power and the Glory forever. Amen.