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John 1:35-51  
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### Come and See

I became a follower of Jesus the moment I was born. Baptized and raised in the Roman Catholic Church, I served as an altar boy, assisting the priest during the mass. There was something holy and mysterious about it all. The bells and smells. I felt part of a holy movement that had been going on for two thousand years. What that meant, I couldn't tell you at the time. But looking back I can see that it was the beginning of my faith journey, my walking with Christ.

It wasn't until I became a teenager that a Baptist friend of mine pressed me further on who Jesus was to me personally. Though I couldn't say for sure, I knew that there was more to Jesus than who I saw hanging on the cross each Sunday. While I knew of Jesus, there was a knowing him personally that I lacked.

It was at that point that I believe Jesus began pursuing me...inviting me to "Come and See"...first through Young Life in high school and then through The Navigators ministry in college. In fact, I started going to a Presbyterian Church with my Navigators leader each Sunday. Do you know how quiet college campuses are at 8:00am on Sunday mornings when you are headed out for church? My learning and experience with Jesus started to grow. And I found that I could actually know and rely on Him as a friend. I had become a disciple of Christ.

After college I was commissioned as an officer in the United States Navy which was a very challenging place to live out one's call as a new disciple. My commanding officer must have seen something in me by the way I lived my life, because one day he asked if I would serve as the ship's protestant lay chaplain as a collateral duty. I agreed. And that was the springboard that launched me into who I am today as a minister of the gospel.

One step at a time. My song was not "I was blind, but now I see." Rather it has been "Step by Step, He leads Me"...a gentle wooing by Jesus... "Come and See."

Our scripture this morning shows us that this was how Jesus called his first disciples. Instead of expecting them to have everything figured out at the start about who he was, people they trusted told them about Jesus so they curiously began following him to see for themselves.

Join me as we read from John 1:35-51 and we see for ourselves who Jesus is to us.

**35** The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. **36** He saw Jesus walking by. John said, "Look! The Lamb of God!"

**37** The two disciples heard him say this. So they followed Jesus. **38** Then Jesus turned around and saw them following. He asked, “What do you want?”

They said, “Rabbi, where are you staying?” Rabbi means Teacher.

**39** “Come,” he replied. “You will see.”

So they went and saw where he was staying. They spent the rest of the day with him. It was about four o’clock in the afternoon.

**40** Andrew was Simon Peter’s brother. Andrew was one of the two disciples who heard what John had said. He had also followed Jesus. **41** The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon. He told him, “We have found the Messiah.” Messiah means Christ. **42** And he brought Simon to Jesus.

Jesus looked at him and said, “You are Simon, son of John. You will be called Cephas.” Cephas means Peter, or Rock.

**43** The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Follow me.”

**44** Philip was from the town of Bethsaida. So were Andrew and Peter.

**45** Philip found Nathanael and told him, “We have found the one whom Moses wrote about in the Law. The prophets also wrote about him. He is Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.”

**46** “Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?” Nathanael asked.

“Come and see,” said Philip.

**47** Jesus saw Nathanael approaching. Here is what Jesus said about him. “He is a true Israelite. Nothing about him is false.”

**48** “How do you know me?” Nathanael asked.

Jesus answered, “I saw you while you were still under the fig tree. I saw you there before Philip called you.”

**49** Nathanael replied, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God. You are the king of Israel.”

**50** Jesus said, “You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You will see greater things than that.” **51** Then he said to the disciples, “What I’m about to tell you is true. You will see heaven open. You will see the angels of God going up and coming down on the Son of Man.”

Let us pray. Prayer of Illumination.

This time last year, I began a sermon series on “The Questions of Jesus.” It was based on this scripture today because I was so intrigued by Jesus’ response when he noticed that two of John’s disciples started following him. “What do you want,” He asked. I think it shows the playfulness of Jesus that we often overlook in the gospels.

So this morning I want to dive into not so much Jesus’ question, you can go back and read that for yourselves, but his response to their follow up question. I

want to consider how Jesus' first disciples came to follow him by word of mouth. We will look more closely into Jesus' interaction with Nathanael, the symbology of the fig tree, and how he had come to follow Jesus. And finally, we will reflect upon what Jesus might be calling us to today.

When Jesus asked, "What do you want?" to these two burly fishermen, it is almost as if Jesus was taken aback by the fact they were following him. Their response is equally funny if you think about it. They are out in the desert, away from the lake and their fishing boats, in other words, far outside their comfort zones, when Jesus asked them this question.

They responded with a different question. "Where are you staying?" John says that "It was about the tenth hour." In biblical days, that meant that it would have been about 4:00pm in the afternoon, or about two hours before sunset. If that were the case and they were indeed far out in the wilderness, then they would have needed to secure a place to spend the night... fast.

It also tells us that what they were intrigued by what they had heard John say of Jesus, "The Lamb of God," and they wanted to hear from Jesus himself. They were intrigued, curious, or had questions. So they asked in a round about way, "Can we continue talking with you?"

One of the things that we need to pay attention to in the gospels is that stories aren't necessarily linear. In other words, they don't follow a normal timeline of this happened first, then that, and then finally that. Notice how John starts off by telling us that that two of John the Baptist's disciples immediately left him to follow Jesus. And then John returns to the story to fill in some details as to how the two actually ended up following Jesus.

Fisherman Andrew had first heard the Good News about Jesus from John the Baptist. Andrew then went and found his brother, Simon, and told him "We have found the Messiah," (that is, the Christ). Just that would garner anyone's curiosity to want to go see for themselves that what they were hearing was true. So off Andrew and Simon went to find Jesus.

Notice that Simon, or later Peter, didn't come to faith in Jesus because of John the Baptists eloquently waxed sermons. One commentator wrote about the importance of the witness of a friend or family member. "Thousands, humanly speaking, would listen to a word from a friend, who will not listen to a sermon. Every believer ought to be a home-missionary, a missionary to their family, children, coworkers, neighbors, and friends."<sup>1</sup>

And so this is how Jesus' first followers came to him. Because someone invited them.

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<sup>1</sup> J.C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on The Gospel of John* (Abbotsford, WI: Akeno Press, 2019), 22.

Andrew told his brother Simon. Andrew and Simon told their friend Philip. And Jesus invited Philip, "Follow me."

The Greek word for "follow" comes from the root word *akoloutheo*. It means to be in the same way with, to accompany, to walk along with. To follow. We get this sense that Jesus was headed somewhere and they dropped everything to walk along with him.

But more so, Jesus was inviting them into something deeper. Learning from him.

Notice back in Verse 38 that Andrew and Simon Peter called Jesus, "Rabbi." In the Bible, the term "rabbi" was a title of respect for Jewish religious teachers. It was used to address people who were masters of Jewish law and distinguished teachers. The term comes from the Hebrew word *rabh*, which means "great".

When Jesus invited Andrew, Simon Peter, and Philip to follow him, he was inviting them to become his disciples.

In Matthew, Jesus told his followers, "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."<sup>2</sup>

A yoke was a teaching that a rabbi might give to his disciples.

Now there is a saying that we might have heard about "being covered in the dust of your rabbi." This comes from Old Hebrew teachings about the relationship between a rabbi and their students. Much of their teaching would be taught along the way somewhere. On the road if you will. The rabbi would walk out front while his students followed behind. Or the rabbi would teach while his students sat at his feet and they feasted off their every word. There came a saying, "May you be covered in the dust of your rabbi." In other words, may you wear his teachings as you follow along.<sup>3</sup>

But some people aren't so easily convinced by our yoke.

Take Nathanael, for example. John tells us that Philip found Nathanael and told him the same thing that Andrew told Simon Peter. "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law about whom the prophets also wrote - Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

Nathanael wasn't so convinced. Notice his snarky skepticism, "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?"

You see, Nazareth was a small, insignificant town with a low reputation, making it an unlikely place from a Jewish perspective that the Messiah would come from there. Besides we know that the chief priest and teachers of the law

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<sup>2</sup> Matthew 11:29-30

<sup>3</sup> Lois Tevrborg, in "Covered in the Dust of Your Rabbi: An Urban Legend?" posted on January 27, 2012 on Our Rabbi Jesus, <https://ourrabbijesus.com/covered-in-the-dust-of-your-rabbi-an-urban-legend/>

told King Herod and Wisemen after Jesus' birth that the Messiah would come from Bethlehem.<sup>4</sup> Not Nazareth.

Despite Nathanael's skepticism and snarkiness, his questions and doubts, Philip didn't try to engage him rationally. He simply welcomed Nathanael's curiosity and doubt, saying, "Come and See." He would let Nathanael make up his own mind about Jesus.

Again commentator J.C. Ryle wrote, "Few are ever moved by reasoning and argument. Still fewer are frightened into repentance. The [one] who does the most good to souls is often the simple believer who says to [their] friends, "I have found a Savior; come and see Him."<sup>5</sup> As we study the Book of Revelation, we will see that it is the testimony of God's people which brings people to faith in Christ.

Time and again, this has proven true in my own life and ministry. Whenever I encounter someone who is wrestling with doubts, concerns or questions about faith, all I can do is invite them to do is "Come and See for yourself." And then back off to give them space to make their own conclusions about Jesus.

We see this in Jesus' interaction with Nathanael.

I love how Jesus throws Nathanael's same snarkiness back at him. "Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false."

"How do you know me?," Nathanael asked.

"I saw you while you were under the fig tree before Philip called you."

The Greek word that Jesus used for "see" comes from the root word *hora* which means to perceive or to see beyond face value. Indeed Jesus had this way of looking into the hearts of people so that he knew exactly what they were thinking. And so Jesus called him out.

But what was the meaning of the fig tree?

There are several explanations. It could have been that Jesus just happened to be observant and saw him sitting under the fig tree before Philip reached out to him.

It could have been that a fig tree in the bible was a common place of contemplation, study, and prayer because it's canopy provided shade from the hot sun. Maybe Jesus saw that Nathanael was deep in thought or prayer.

Or it could have been that Nathanael knew the Old Testament scriptures about the Messiah. We already know that Nathanael knew that the Messiah wouldn't come from Nazareth. So maybe this reference was that Jesus knew Nathanael's heart as one who was waiting for the Messiah to come.

The Old Testament prophet Micah wrote of the coming Messiah and the age he would bring he said, "He will judge between many peoples and will settle

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<sup>4</sup> Matthew 2:5-6

<sup>5</sup> J.C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on The Gospel of John*, 23.

disputes for strong nations far and wide. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. Every man will sit under his own vine and under his own fig tree and no one will make them afraid.”<sup>6</sup>

The prophet Zechariah wrote, “In that day each of you will invite his neighbor to sit under his vine and fig tree,” declares the Lord.”<sup>7</sup>

Somehow, Jesus’ calling out Nathanael proved to him that he was the Messiah and so he put his trust and faith in him.

Philip, his friend, did his part in simply inviting Nathanael to Jesus, “Come and See.” Make up your own mind. And then Jesus took care of the rest.

So what do we hear the Spirit of God saying to us today?

I think God is inviting us to take risks and put our faith in Jesus out there. Modern ideals of evangelism are intimidating in our post-modern age. But what if sharing Jesus with others is not so much about theologically convincing them that we are right and they are wrong? What if instead evangelism was simply saying, “Come and see Jesus for yourself?” Could we do that?

And where could people come and see Jesus for themselves?

Right here at Cascades!

A recent pole showed the power of a personal invite and how people came into the church.<sup>8</sup>

6-8% Walked in by own initiative

2-3% Liked a program offered

8-10% Liked the pastor

3-4% Had a need met by the church

1-2% Were evangelized

3-4% Attracted by Sunday School

70-85% Invited by a trusted relative or friend!

How many of us found our way to Cascades by a personal invitation? Now if I were a betting man, I’d put all my eggs into the invitation basket.

With Easter coming soon, what if we prayerfully considered who the Lord might put on our hearts to invite to church to hear the Good News of Jesus’ resurrection? Just know that it might take some time for the idea to germinate. But in the right time, they will come.

And then we let them make up their own minds about what they think about Jesus. But trust that the Holy Spirit will meet them just where they are and eventually will bring them to faith in Jesus. Christ, the Messiah.

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<sup>6</sup> Micah 4:3-4

<sup>7</sup> Zechariah 3:10

<sup>8</sup> <https://churchtrainer.com/the-power-of-an-invite/>

My friends, the power of invitation lies in its simplicity and its potential for life-changing impact. Just as Jesus invited his first disciples to "come and see," and they in turn invited others, we too are called to extend this invitation to those around us. By inviting others to experience Jesus for themselves, we participate in Jesus' ongoing ministry of love and transformation in the world.

So may we accept Jesus' invitation to follow him even though he leaves out much of the details of what that entails. May we believe by faith that he is the Messiah who takes away the sin of the world. And may we boldly take risks to invite others to "Come and See" that the Lord is good here at Cascades. Amen.