



January 7, 2018

JESUS SAYS, "COME AND SEE"

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JOHN 1:35-51 NRSV

³⁵The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, ³⁶and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!" ³⁷The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. ³⁸When 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?" ³⁹He 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. ⁴⁰One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. ⁴¹He first found his brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated Anointed). ⁴²He 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).

⁴³The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." ⁴⁴Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. ⁴⁵Philip 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." ⁴⁶Nathaniel said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see."

⁴⁷When Jesus saw Nathaniel coming toward him, he said of him, "Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!" ⁴⁸Nathaniel asked him, "Where did you get to know me?" Jesus answered, "I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you."

⁴⁹Nathaniel replied, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" ⁵⁰Jesus answered "Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these." ⁵¹And 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."

If you own a computer and spend time on email, then you probably get your share of chain emails. You know what I mean. They're the group emails that get forwarded from one person to another. They might be about anything from politics to religion to very cute little puppies. And sometimes these emails come with an ominous warning: Send this on to all of your closest friends or something bad just might happen to you.

I see a chain email as yet another thing in our world clamoring for our attention: *You've gotta' see this. It really hits home. It's well worth your time.* But is it worth our time? Should we open it up?

I did a quick perusal of a few of the chain emails I got the week before Christmas. One of them was amusing: boxes of chocolate were singing Jingle Bells to unsuspecting customers at a supermarket. A second email was informative: a factoid (along with video proof) appeared on the screen. It stated that annually more than 13,000 golfers go straight from their round of golf to the hospital emergency room. The message being: better be careful out there! A third email was alarming: Clergy, you may soon find your taxes going way up – read this now!!!

So, what do you think, did I open any of these? Well, **I needed to consider the source.** The “boxes of chocolate” email was from someone who regularly sends out these sorts of things. I figured there would be others coming soon enough. So no, I didn't open it. **I needed to consider the time.** This was the week before Christmas. I had a lot on my plate. And I wasn't going to be playing any golf for at least three to four months. So no, I didn't open that one either. **And finally, I needed to consider my personal well-being.** Taxes will be something that many of us take a closer look at in the coming year. So yes, I opened it up and I read every last word.

Today's reading from the gospel of John reminds me a little of those chain emails. John the Baptist is trying to get people's attention. Of course, he's not talking about singing boxes of chocolate or dangerous encounters on the golf course, or even taxes. No, he's talking about a new rabbi named Jesus, and the impact he's having. Upon seeing him, John the Baptist can hardly contain himself: *Look, you've gotta' see this. He's well worth your time. Here is the Lamb of God.*

Like a lot of passages in John's gospel, this one requires a careful reading to unpack what it means. That's because John tells his story a little differently than Matthew, Mark, and Luke. For instance, John's gospel spends very little time with John the Baptist waist-deep in the Jordan River, baptizing any and all who came to him. Rather, as Pastor Shelley mentioned in her sermon last week, the gospel primarily pictures John the Baptist as a witness. Today we hear more of John's witnessing: *Look, here is the Lamb of God. You've gotta' see this.*

Did you catch what comes next? We don't know how many people listen to John the Baptist, and how many simply shrug and walk away, but John does manage to get the attention of two of his own disciples. On the spot, they stop following John and start following Jesus.

How does this happen? We're not sure. Truth be told, these disciples might not be sure either. But here's a possibility: As with our chain emails, perhaps they consider the source. John the Baptist is trustworthy. Perhaps they consider the timing: It's not every day that a new rabbi arrives on the scene and pays attention to them. And perhaps they consider their own well-being. Like a lot of people in the first century, they're longing for Messiah to come rescue God's people.

So, for whatever reason, these two disciples begin to follow Jesus. Jesus turns and asks them a pointed question, “What are you looking for?” It's a great question, the kind that often catches a person off guard. They blurt out, “Rabbi, where are you staying?” Their response

seems a little odd. But remember, the stories in John require a careful reading. In this case, the word “stay” can also be translated as “abide.” And abiding is one of the key words in the entire gospel. In other words, these two disciples are asking, “Rabbi, where are you *abiding*? And in particular, are you abiding *with God*.” Jesus picks up on their curiosity and says, “Come and see.”

One of these disciples is Andrew. He’s flush with excitement over his encounter with Jesus. Immediately he goes and finds his brother Simon. He announces, “Simon, we have found the Messiah. You need to come and see.” And he brings Simon with him back to Jesus.

The next day, Jesus goes to Galilee. He invites Philip to follow him. Right away Philip goes and finds his friend Nathaniel. Philip can barely contain his enthusiasm, “We have found the one spoken of in the law and the prophets. He’s Joseph’s son. He’s from Nazareth.” Now, evidently Nazareth is a bit of a backwater town. Nathaniel is skeptical, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth.” Philip says, “Come and see.”

Over and over again in John’s gospel, the disciples of Jesus are invited to come and see. And then, as an outgrowth of their discipleship, they are encouraged to go and tell – to go and be a witnesses. If today’s story is any indication, being a witness is not a burden but an opportunity. It starts with getting people’s attention: *You’ve gotta’ see this. It really hits home. It’s well worth your time.*

So, let me ask you, what are we supposed to do with a story like this? Are we supposed to be witnesses? We are shy Lutherans, after all? We subscribe to the adage, “Actions speak louder than words.” Plus, we’ve all had less-than-positive experiences with folks who’ve felt the need to get us “saved,” which usually has meant, to get us to think and act like they do.

So, you, me, witnesses? What do you think? Before we go sending off a chain email, we might want to imagine ourselves in other peoples’ shoes: 1) Would they be considering the source? And if so, would they find us trustworthy? 2) Would the timing be right? Are they at a point in life where they’re asking questions? Searching for advice? For meaning? For hope? 3) Would they be willing to trust their well-being to us? If so, would we be able to be vulnerable with them? Here’s the way I see it: If many, if not most, of these factors come together, you and I will have an opportunity to be a witness. Christ will take our words – and our deeds – and use them to make a difference in somebody’s life. Just like those early disciples of Jesus, we will have an opportunity to say to someone, “Come and see.”

A few years ago, I was sitting in my office at Transfiguration Lutheran Church in Bloomington. I heard a knock on the door. There stood a young man about 25-years-old. He was wearing a bright red shirt that said “Pizza Hut.” He’d just finished a delivery. He was wondering if we could talk.

The man told me he’d lived in Bloomington for his entire life. He’d spent some time going to Sunday School as a child, but it had been a long time since he’d been a church. He had a sheepish look on his face, like I was going to scold him or something. Finally he blurted out his reason for coming: “Pastor, tell me why I should believe in this Jesus stuff, anyway.”

Now, you’d think pastors worth their salt would have a ready-made answer to this question, and maybe they do. But I didn’t. After hemming and hawing for a few minutes, I mumbled

something about God creating the world good, and us messing it up, and then God coming in Jesus to make it right again. I tried to be clear, but as best I could tell, I wasn't connecting with the Pizza Hut guy very well.

Finally – and perhaps ironically – I ended up asking him the same question that Jesus asked those two early disciples, “What are you looking for?” He responded, “I don't know. Something's not right in my life, and I'm not sure what it is.” That's about as far as we got in our conversation. After a few more minutes, the Pizza Hut guy got out of his chair, walked to the door, and I never saw him again.

What would you have said to the Pizza Hut guy? Why should he believe in this Jesus stuff? It's a question that's getting asked more and more these days. Maybe you've asked it too. It gets to the heart of our search for meaning in life.

I have a suggestion for you. Over the next four months, as we read through the gospel of John, I encourage you whenever possible to place yourself in these stories. Ask the questions the characters are asking. Jesus changes water into wine – *what might your abundance mean for me, Rabbi?* Nicodemus comes to Jesus under the cover of darkness – *what am I sometimes afraid of and not wanting others to see?* A Samaritan woman meets up with Jesus by a well – *how might Jesus' "living water" quench my deepest thirst?* Hopefully, as we place ourselves in these stories, we'll have a better sense of what we're looking for in life, and a deeper conviction of how Jesus' presence can make a difference for us.

As we work our way through John, eventually we'll see that the question Jesus asks those first disciples gets changed. It will go from “*What* are you looking for?” to “*Whom* are you looking for?” We will find that the journey of discipleship is less about ready-made answers and more about a living, abiding relationship with Jesus.

Friends, I don't know where you are on your journey of faith, but I invite you to be part of the journey with Jesus in John's gospel. And more importantly, I invite you to experience a living, abiding relationship with him. *Come and see.* And beyond that, I have a hunch that there's pizza delivery guy out there, or a sister, or a son who might need to have a conversation with you. Have that conversation. *Go and tell.* It might make all the difference in the world. Amen.