



September 12, 2021
Sermon Series: *Regather*

Come and See
Pastor Vern Christopherson

John 1:35-42 NRSV

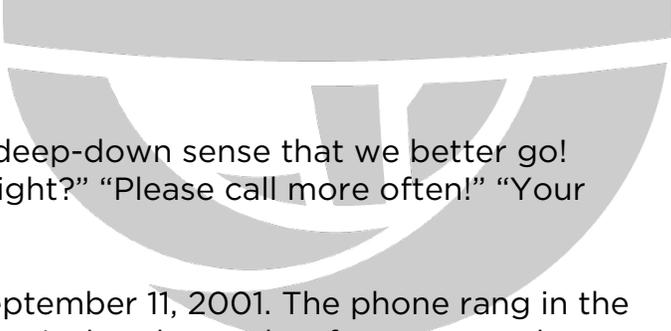
³⁵The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, ³⁶and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!" ³⁷The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. ³⁸When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, "What are you looking for?" 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).

Invitations come to us in a variety of ways. *Try this, go there, consider that!* Many of these invitations are a little like the invitation we hear in our gospel for today: *come and see*.

Invitations often pique our interest: "Come to dinner. We'll gather on the back porch and enjoy a pleasant summer evening." Or, "Come and check out the giant pumpkins at the Minnesota State Fair! And while you're here, see Linda Christensen's fiftieth and final butter sculpture of Princess Kay of Milky Way."

Some invitations bring delight: "Grandparents, come and watch your grandchild's soccer game." "Veterans, take an honor flight to Washington, D.C."

In 1965, as a nineteen-year-old student at the University of Minnesota, Jeanine Brose Ransom invited her mother – yes, her mother – to go with her to a Beatles' concert at Metropolitan Stadium. She even asked her mom to pick up the tickets. Mom was a good sport about it. Jeanine describes the night like this: "She didn't scream through the whole concert, but I did!"



Other invitations are more insistent. We have a deep-down sense that we better go! “You’re coming home for Thanksgiving dinner, right?” “Please call more often!” “Your dad’s having surgery. I need you here!”

I got an insistent invitation on the morning of September 11, 2001. The phone rang in the office of the church I was serving in Bloomington. A church member from across the street had a anxious tone to his voice: “You need to come now and see what’s happening in New York City!” I hurried across the street to watch. The Twin Towers were on fire. Three hours later I was still watching.

The only reason I stopped was because we decided to send out an invitation of our own, inviting the congregation to worship that evening. The church was packed. There were lots of prayers and tears. That’s the thing about invitations. They remind of us of our ongoing need to be together.

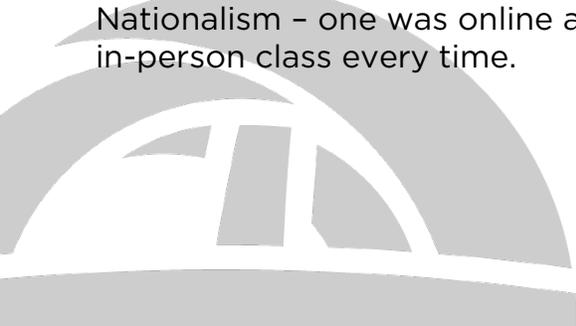
In the Gospel of John, John the Baptist plays the role of inviter-in-chief. You could say that throughout John, John the Baptist is more of an inviter, more of a witness, than he is a baptizer. John knows his place. He’s not the main event, but the one coming after him is. When confronted by the religious authorities, he tells them plainly: “I am *not* the prophet our people have been waiting for. I am *not* the Messiah we’ve been hoping for.” The authorities push him: “Who are you then?” John answers: “I am the voice crying out in the wilderness, “Prepare the way of the Lord.”

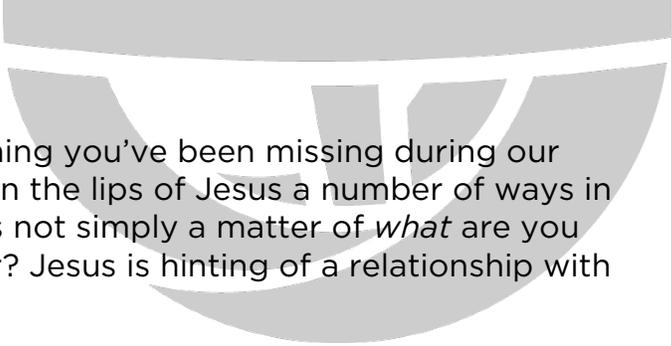
Before long, John spots Jesus walking his way. The first thing he says is this: “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” John gets so caught up in bearing witness to Jesus, the Lamb of God, that right then and there two of his own disciples stop following him and start following Jesus. Jesus glances over his shoulder and notices them. He asks, “What are you looking for?” I can picture these two new disciples squirming a bit.

What are they looking for? Imagine Jesus asking that question of us: “What are you looking for...on the way to work, as you meet a friend for coffee, as you head into church? *Why have you come?*”

Over the next couple months, we’re focusing on **regathering** at Zumbro. We’ve been apart for a long time – too long. It’s so long that we might have started wondering: “Why do church at all? What’s the point? Do I really need other Christians to keep my faith strong and alive?”

I want to say yes. I hope you do, too. I’ve definitely been missing some things along the way: 1) I was watching the worship stream one Sunday. In the middle of a hymn, I slammed my computer shut and said, “I don’t like singing by myself!” 2) We had a pre-delta-variant time when we set aside many of our asks. I realized how much I missed seeing people’s faces and smiles. 3) In June, I led a couple of discussions on Christian Nationalism – one was online and the other in-person. Given the choice, I’d pick an in-person class every time.





Friends, what are you looking for? Is there anything you've been missing during our pandemic? That's a question that will show up on the lips of Jesus a number of ways in John's Gospel. Know that when Jesus asks it, it's not simply a matter of *what* are you looking for, but rather *whom* are you looking for? Jesus is hinting of a relationship with him.

The response of Jesus' two new disciples seems odd: "Rabbi, where are you staying?" I doubt they're looking for a street address. The word for "staying" in Greek is *meno*. It's often translated as "abiding." "Rabbi, where are you abiding?" It's a word that occurs over 40 times in John. It has very little to do with a correct understanding or a proper identification of all the roles Jesus plays. No, it's relationship language: "To find *what* you're looking for," Jesus is telling them, "you'll need to start abiding more with me."

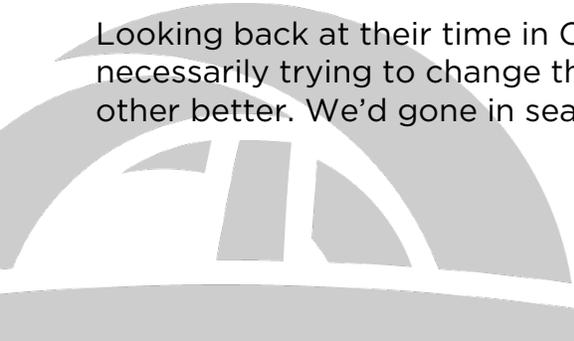
Next comes Jesus' invitation to them: "Come and see." What Andrew, and Peter, and the other disciples will soon discover is that being in a relationship with a guy named Jesus will probably change their lives.

Shane Claiborne is a follower of Jesus whose life got changed. After spending time studying theology, he and a friend named Brooke went in search of authentic Christianity. Claiborne discusses the search in his book, *The Irresistible Revolution*. They started their search - of all places - in Calcutta, India with the Missionaries of Charity. Perhaps naively, Shane called them up one day and asked if he could speak to Mother Teresa. There was a muffled voice on the line: "This is Mother Teresa." Shane was instantly skeptical: "Yeah, right, and I'm the pope." He *thought* it, but he didn't say it. Good thing because it really was Mother Teresa. As the conversation went on, she extended the same invitation to Shane and Brooke that she shared with all who wanted to see her work in Calcutta: "Come and see."

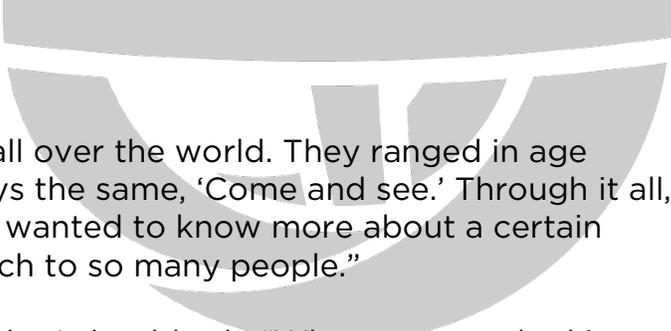
Shane Claiborne readily admits in his book to being unprepared. He questioned Mother Teresa about what they would eat and where they would sleep." Mother Teresa replied, "We don't worry too much about that. God takes care of the lilies and the sparrows, and God will take care of you. Just come!"

As it turns out, they did come. They went thinking they might stay for a week or two, or a month or two, but they ended up staying longer. And their lives got changed in the process.

Their work began with soap and water. Every week they took soap and bubbles and met about a hundred street kids at a water hole. They'd set up a station to help bandage wounds, a station to sew clothes that were torn, and an area for washing off the kids and splashing each other. Some of the kids just wanted to be touched with love. Others confessed to intentionally scraping their knees so they could be held and healed.



Looking back at their time in Calcutta, Claiborne says in so many words: "We weren't necessarily trying to change the world. We were just trying to learn how to love each other better. We'd gone in search of authentic Christianity and what we found instead



were followers of Jesus. Volunteers came from all over the world. They ranged in age from 18-80. Mother Teresa's invitation was always the same, 'Come and see.' Through it all, we found that we had one thing in common: we wanted to know more about a certain rabbi named Jesus, and why he mattered so much to so many people."

Friends, what are you looking for today? Or maybe I should ask, "Whom are you looking for today? "Come and see," Jesus invites us. Really, you might find more than you're looking for. And you might wind up getting changed in the process.

Harold Geerdes of Zumbro has gotten changed along the way. This past week, Harold was placed on hospice. He's 96 years old. He's been battling prostate cancer for quite some time. Then he came down with a serious infection. Doctors began thinking it might be a matter of weeks or even days.

I went to visit Harold in the hospital on Wednesday morning. I shared with him what the Apostle Paul had written as he neared the end of his life. He wrote to a young co-worker, Timothy: "I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith. And now there's a crown of righteousness waiting for me."

I told Harold that the same was true for him: he'd fought the good fight; he'd finished the race; he'd kept the faith. I said a prayer with Harold and got ready to leave.

Just then, I extended an invitation: "Harold, would you like communion? I've got it in my car. I'll be glad to get it." Harold nodded his head.

I was soon back with my communion kit. I asked the nurse if it would be okay to share it. She said yes, but we might need to raise his head a little higher. I didn't want to be a bother. I offered to keep it simple: just a little piece of wafer, dipped in the wine, and slipped into Harold's mouth."

As I entered the room, I told Harold that that's what I was going to do. He responded clearly with a single word: "All." No communion-lite for Harold. He wanted the full meal. So, I got the nurse, we raised up the bed, and Harold got "all" he was asking for, all the love, all the forgiveness, and all the strength Christ had to offer.

I was profoundly moved by Harold's request. Looking back, I see it like this: Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Harold wasn't sure how much time he had left. While he waited, he wanted to eat and drink in abundance.

Friends, what or whom are you looking for this day? I invite you to come and see Jesus, to abide in him. You won't be disappointed. Amen.

