

## Come and See

John 1: 35-51

Last Sunday we were in Mark's gospel at the baptism of Jesus. Today we pick up after his baptism in John's gospel with the calling of the disciples. The key phrase is Come and See. It is Jesus' invitation to us, and both words signal something deeper. To "come" is to move yourself into the presence of Jesus and abide there for a while, abide with the One who has chosen to make his abode with us. To "see" is to see more deeply than with our physical eyes, that is, with the eyes of our hearts.

So this day, let us "come and see."

### I

It starts with John the Baptizer the day after Jesus' baptism. He was walking with two of his disciples. As Jesus passed by, he said, "Behold the Lamb!" The deepest theological language is poetical, beneath, beyond the literal. He is the one, John says, "who takes away the sin of the world", not just our personal sins, but the deeper power of sin which keeps all people in its thrall.

John's disciples heard him and followed after Jesus. Jesus turned to them and said, "What do you seek?" What are you looking for? It is the profoundest of questions. Can you hear the plaintive sounds of the rock band U-2: "But I still

haven't found what I'm looking for"? The answer to "what are you looking for" may be the beginning of our spiritual journey.

They said to him "Rabbi, Teacher, where are you staying?" In John language is often double-layered. We begin on the surface, like with a bucket of water; then Jesus pulls us deeper, to the water within welling up to eternal life.

Rabbi, where are you staying? What is your abode, where do you come from? The question is deeper than where are you spending the night; it is where is your spiritual abode? So Jesus does not answer, "Down at the Holiday Inn", or at Martha and Mary's house. He says, "come and see." At the close of the Overture to John's gospel, which we looked at two weeks ago, John writes that Jesus resides in the bosom of the Father, close to the heartbeat of God.

Where are you staying?

Close to the heart of God.

Where is that?

Come and see.

Jesus bids us to come close and abide, no longer spiritual tourists but disciples, *learners*, as the word disciple means, abiders.

One of John's disciples at the scene was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He ran to Simon and said "We've found the Messiah" then brought him to Jesus. Sometimes in order to come to Jesus, we need to be brought! How about with you? Who brought you?

Jesus looked at him and said, "So you're Simon. I'm going to name you *Cephas*—his name in Jesus' Aramaic tongue, which would become in Greek, Peter. Rock.

### III

Next scene. Jesus heads north to Nazareth and finds a man named Phillip. Did he go looking for him? Jesus was a different kind of rabbi. Normally students came to the *rabbis* to be students. Jesus went to find *them*. Still does.

"Follow me", Jesus said, and Phillip said yes. Then the first thing he did was to go find Nathaniel. That's how discipling happens: Going and finding. The verb finding is used 5 times in the text. Phillip said to him:

We have found him of whom Moses and the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, Joseph's son!

Nathaniel replied with a mouthful of skepticism: "What good can come out of Nazareth?"

We smile with recognition. He is us. Was Nathaniel from Cana voicing the rivalry between the two towns, Cana and Nazareth? Have you ever made fun of another town, or looked down on a town? Or a part of your town? You go first! Nazareth was a hick town compared to Cana, a village of 200-300 residences. The Messiah from *there*?!

Maybe it didn't jive with his reading of biblical prophecies. Sometimes the way we read the Bible hides the real Jesus from us. My old friend Doug Marlette, political cartoonist for the Charlotte Observer for many years once drew Jesus in a tattered robe. Readers blasted him. Jesus wasn't poor! He wore a "seamless robe", the robe of a gentleman! Some want Jesus to be a powerful autocrat, not a servant who washed people's feet.

But John was making his deeper theological point again. Jesus' real hometown, his real abode, was not Nazareth, but at the bosom of the Father, close to the heartbeat of God.

We need to adjust the optics. Not Nazareth but the realm of heaven. We need a new map. Not northern Israel near the Sea of Galilee, but the realm of the kingdom of God.

How did Philip answer Nathaniel? No reproach, no explanation, just, "Come and see".

## IV

When Jesus saw Nathaniel coming toward him, he said, “Behold an Israelite in whom there is no guile.” With Nathaniel, what you saw was what you got. What he felt he blurted out. The inside and the outside of Nathaniel were the same.

Nathaniel replied, “How do you know me?” And Jesus said, “Before Phillip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you under the fig tree.” What did Jesus see in Nathaniel under the fig tree that formed this impression? Had he overheard Nathaniel selling his camel saying to the buyer, “You need to know that when he was young he broke his leg. It may still give him trouble.” We of course cannot know, but isn’t it true that we often reveal our truest selves, for better and for worse, when we think no one is looking? Jesus saw in him a true Israelite, one in whom there was no guile, no deceit, without pretense.

Nathaniel then overcome with feeling offered up his confession of faith: “Rabbi, you are the son of God. You are the king of Israel.”

As I re-read this I recalled the words of the 17<sup>th</sup> century British parson and poet, George Herbert, a poem which has become a beautiful hymn:

King of glory, king of peace,  
I will love thee;  
and that love may never cease,  
I will move thee.  
Thou hast granted my request,  
thou hast heard me;  
thou didst note my working breast,  
Thou hast spared me.

Wherefore with my utmost art  
I will sing Thee,  
and the cream of all my heart  
I will bring thee.

(Not 2% milk, the cream of my heart!)

Seven whole days, not one in seven,  
I will praise thee;  
in my heart, though not in heaven  
I can raise thee.

Small it is in this poor sort to enroll thee;  
e'en eternity's too short  
to extol thee. <sup>1</sup>

## V

Jesus then told Nathaniel that he would see even more!

Truly, truly, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending  
and descending upon the Son of Man.

Do you remember Jacob the cheat fleeing his brother and home, sleeping under  
the stars, a stone for a pillow? And God gave him a glorious vision of heaven  
opened and a golden ladder stretching from heaven to earth with angels  
ascending and descending. Then God spoke out of the dream: "Be not afraid. I  
will be with you...always". And Jacob said, "Surely God is in this place."

## Conclusion

Can we have such moments, not all-the-time moments, but real, when we  
say "Surely God is in this place."

The key is in that favorite word of John, "abide". The secret is in the  
"abiding", as we come and stay for a while, or in the Southern vernacular, "stay a  
spell."

This is the key: to abide in him, abide in his word and keep his commandments. Above all, as we abide in his love, and learn ourselves to love.

Don't check out of the Jesus Hotel too soon. Don't as A.A. puts it, "leave before a miracle."

So let us this good year, abide and keep abiding. There is so much to see, to learn, to be, to do.

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1. George Herbert, *The Country Parson, The Temple* (N.Y.: Paulist press, 1981), p. 270.

And the hymn, "King of Glory, King of Peace" *A New Hymnal For Colleges and Schools*, p. 434.