

## EPIPHANY 2 B: COME AND SEE

Come and see.

Think, for a moment, about the effect those words might have on you were you to hear them in an everyday context. Would they generate a certain sense of excitement about whatever it might be you were being invited to witness? Perhaps curiosity? Or maybe gratitude that someone thought to include you?

Come and see.

The words are both simple and warm, issuing an invitation not only to see something, but also to join a community. To come along and be part of something.

Come and see.

These words, this invitation, form the heart not simply of this opening scene but much of John's Gospel. John's story is structured around encounters with Jesus. Again and again, from these early disciples, to the Pharisee named Nicodemus, to the Samaritan women at the well, to the man born blind, to Peter and Pilate and eventually Thomas, characters throughout John's Gospel are encountered by Jesus. John structures his story this way, to offer us a variety of possibilities, both in terms of the kind of people to whom Jesus reaches out and the kinds of responses they offer...and we might offer as well.

And so across the pages of John's Gospel there are women and men, Jews and Gentiles, rich and poor, powerful and vulnerable, people of all shapes and sizes and varieties that Jesus meets. And to each one, in one way or another, he says the same thing: come and see. Come and see God do a new thing. Come and see as your future

opens up in front of you. Come and see the grace of God made manifest and accessible and available to all.

In response, some take up that invitation and follow, while others are puzzled, confused, or simply do not believe Jesus' offer. And some not only follow but invite others to do the same.

In today's reading we have several of these possibilities before us. By way of background, it's helpful to note that just earlier John the Baptist had testified that Jesus is the lamb of God, the one appointed to take away the sin of the world. And so he instructs his disciples to go follow Jesus. Several do, including Andrew, who also finds his brother Peter. Jesus then comes to Galilee and bids Philip, who perhaps also was one of John's disciples and who lived in the same town as Andrew and Peter, to "follow me." Philip not only does, but he also seeks out Nathaniel to invite him to do the same. And even in the space of these few verses we have folks who run the gamut from eager to downright skeptical (to the point of being insulting). And yet each is invited – some by Jesus, others by each other – to come and see Jesus and, eventually, to follow him.

Come and see.

This is an invitation. If you've ever asked someone or contemplated asking someone to come and see Jesus, what do you anticipate their answer to the invitation might be. "Why?"

Knowing this I want you to think about the next two questions. Take a minute individually to think about this question, **“What is your favorite thing about the life we share in this faith community?” (Pause)** Now turn and talk to your neighbour about your answer.

Then think about the following question: **Would you be willing to invite someone you know to come and see and share this aspect of our congregational life that you enjoy?”** Now turn to your neighbour and discuss.

Talking about our faith even with someone who might be close to us is not always easy.

The reality is however we can't invite people to worship if we don't know why we ourselves come to worship.

Come and See.

Such easy, warm, and hospitable words. The heart not only of John's Gospel but Christian evangelism, as we are called not to cram our faith down another's throat or question their eternal destiny or threaten them with hellfire, but instead simply to offer an invitation to come and see what God is still doing in and through Jesus and the community of disciples who have chosen to follow him.

But as simple and as non-threatening as these words are, I wonder how many of you have ever uttered them, or anything remotely like them. For that matter, I wonder how often we have said them, not only to people who came to church one Sunday but to folks we meet in our daily lives.

I don't ask this question to point fingers, but rather to highlight the reality that most of us aren't comfortable inviting others to church. Which is a challenge. You probably know as well as I do that the key factor influencing persons to attend a church for the first time is a personal invitation. It's not the size or reputation of the church; it's not the beautiful or simple building; it's not the service times, style of worship, or quality of the music; it's not even the brilliant preaching of the minister. All those things have value, but the number one reason people give for coming to a church for the first time is that someone invited them personally. Just as Philip said to Nathaniel, that is, someone said to them, "Come and see." Which means that the future of the church depends greatly on ordinary, everyday people summoning the courage to invite someone to come and see what they have found in the community of the faithful that is their congregation.

The future of the church may rest on our ability to invite others to come and see what we have found in our congregation. In a culture that no longer has a vested interest in encouraging congregational participation, the future of our faith communities will, I believe, be greatly determined by our willingness to invite others to share what we have found. But the future of the church is without a doubt in God's trustworthy hands. And the same Spirit who descended on Jesus at Baptism is still working among us. Indeed, the Spirit that inspired Philip and Andrew, who reached out through their efforts to others, and who overcame even the skepticism of Nathaniel is still offering all

kinds of people all over the world an invitation to “come and see” and creating in them the desire to do just that.