

Sermon  
January 17, 2021  
2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Epiphany

Gospel - John 1:43-51

Come and see! Follow me! Do you have a memory as a child of someone saying to you excitedly “come and see, follow me”? Maybe it was a bird’s nest with newly laid eggs, or a great place to ride your bike with cool little hills to make you feel like you’re flying. Or your best friend arrived unannounced to you but someone came to tell you, no, you can’t believe it, but come and see! Whatever it was, there was first another person who made the invitation, “Heidi (Lisa, Karen, Peter, Hergy, Glenn, ...), come and see, follow me.” The disciples are a motley bunch that are called to follow Jesus, the one who has been promised by Moses and the prophets of old. The disciples of Jesus are named and called, come and see, follow me! We are among them.

At this point in the gospel Jesus has been baptized by John and is now about to embark on his ministry. He does not do that alone, Jesus gathers a community around him. One commentator said that “Jesus does not seem interested in solo spirituality or the lone believer.” I’d like to go back to the text and read the verses prior to today’s gospel.

*From verse 35: The next day John (the Baptist) again was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, “Look, here is the Lamb of God!” the two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. When 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?” He 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.*

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 tells his disciples to go follow Jesus. Several do,

including Andrew, who also finds his brother Simon, to be called Peter. Sensing their presence Jesus turns and asks, what are you looking for? And maybe simply knowing that they will learn from him they ask, “Teacher, where are you staying?” And Jesus response, “come and see” is invitation to be together and they do that! They just hang out. But what excitement! Come and see!

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, “Come and see.” 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.

Without doubt there was something about Jesus that drew people to him. When British biblical scholar J.B. Phillips translated the Gospels, he was struck by the personality of Jesus and how he drew others to himself. He concluded that there must have been something extraordinary about his person that affected those with whom he came into contact.

Jesus has a profound effect when he meets people: the Canaanite woman (Matthew 15:21-28), the blind man at Bethsaida (Mark 8:22-26), the Roman centurion (Luke 7:1-10), the woman at the Pharisee’s home (Luke 7:36-50), Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10), the woman at the well (John 4), the sick man at the Bethesda pool (John 5:1-9), the thief crucified next to Jesus (Luke 23:40-43), and the centurion at the foot of the cross (Mark 15:39, Luke 23:47) — to name only a few.

People meet Jesus, and they are changed. Whatever their deepest need was, Jesus meets it. Then they tell others what happened.

It’s always person-to-person.

The disciples are compelled to follow Jesus because of who Jesus is and the invitation to do so is either from Jesus himself or another person. It is not through threat or

cajole; Philip didn't pout, convince or hammer on Nathanael when he said, "What good can come out of Nazareth?" He simply extended the invitation, "Come and see."

You are here this morning. You are part of this faith community, part of the body of Christ known as the Christian church. How did you get here? What was your "come and see" or "follow me" experience? Who extended the invitation to you? For me, my parents brought me to church as an infant to be baptized. I grew up with invitation to participate, to be a part of the Christian church community.

In turn have you invited another to come to church? If so how did that feel? How did it go? This part is much harder than being invited. We too often feel that faith and religion talk is too personal to talk about. Or that it's our responsibility to convince or prove something first.

No. We're just invited to say — not to push, just to say — "Come and see." Why? Because this news is so good it's hard not to share, especially with the people we care about. And if they aren't interested, or dismiss what we're saying, or make some smart aleck response, that's okay. We know that the good news of God's love for us and all the world can be hard to believe. In fact, the more we honestly think about it — *God, the creator and sustainer of the vast cosmos, not only knows we exist but deeply cares* — the harder it may become to believe! So we can understand why people aren't sure, why they may hesitate. Because this news is so good it may seem to some too good to be true. So it's okay if they're not sure or walk away. It's not our job to convert, just to invite.

Yet as simple and non-threatening as this invitation is, many of us — myself included! — have a hard time making it. I guess it's because most of us aren't comfortable talking about this kind of stuff. I mean, maybe we're just nervous about sharing our faith in a culture that doesn't exactly encourage it. Or maybe we don't want to come off as some kind of religious nut. Maybe it's all this and more. (Pastor David Lose)

But maybe our invitation isn't to church at all; maybe it's just entering into a conversation about what's important. What is a spiritual life? What does it mean to

follow Jesus? How do I live as a follower of Jesus? What does it mean to be a child of God? This is an intimate conversation.

Our spirituality is at the heart of who and whose we are. We hear about Andrew, Simon Peter, Philip, Nathanael, we know their names. They are called by Jesus by name. The psalm today is Ps 139 about God's deepest knowledge of us each.

<sup>1</sup>LORD, you have | searched me out;

O LORD, you | have known me.

<sup>2</sup>**You know my sitting down and my | rising up;  
you discern my thoughts | from afar.**

<sup>3</sup>You trace my journeys and my | resting-places  
and are acquainted with | all my ways.

<sup>13</sup>For you yourself created my | inmost parts;

you knit me together in my | mother's womb.

Maybe the invitation is to this conversation. Come and see, we are created by God; God knows us literally inside and out! In our imperfectness we are Gods and in spite of that imperfectness we are still called to share that message of God's presence and love.

Jesus' clinching words intrigue: "You will see heaven opened, and angels ascending and descending" (verse 51). Clearly this passage alludes to Genesis 28, when Jacob was not praying or seeking God. He was on the run, anxious, exhausted, trying to sleep with a rock for his pillow. He dreams of traffic between heaven and earth, and when he wakes up stunned, he says, "Surely the Lord was in this place but I did not know it" (Genesis 28:16). Maybe Nathanael and Philip thought the same thing. This is the spiritual life: not eyes closed in prayer, Bible open, kneeling at the altar or singing a hymn. It is being out and about—and God was and is there, although you might realize it only in retrospect. (Pastor James Howell)

"Come and see, follow me!" It feels so good to be invited! To be called to share such very good news that we are unconditionally loved by God who is present in our every

moment, who is seen in the faces of the people around us every day. Thanks be to  
God. Amen