

January 16, 2005
Isaiah 49:1-7, John 1:35-51
Dr. Lewis Galloway

“You’ve Got to Come See This!”

“You’ve got to come see this!” Out on a walk, we turn our eyes to see something in the woods or on a hill or near a waterfall. Perhaps we’re in the Children’s Museum or at the zoo when we hear that exclamation from a child. A friend may be watching television in another room, when we hear her cry, “You’ve got to come see this!” We do come and see.

The gospel of John opens with a kind of exclamation, “You’ve got to come see this!” John draws our attention to Jesus with the beautiful prologue that proclaims Jesus is the “word made flesh.” Jesus is the light that shines in the darkness which the darkness cannot overcome. Immediately after this opening, John the Baptist points to Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. John’s own disciples hear these words about Jesus and turn to see him.

They ask Jesus, “Where are you staying?” Jesus replies, “Come and see.” They drop everything and follow him. Along the way, Andrew goes to get his brother Simon. Andrew blurts out with great excitement, “We have found the Messiah.” Simon follows him in order to see Jesus. Jesus renames him Peter, which means “a rock.” So begins a chain reaction of one person inviting another to “come and see.” The fact that we are all here this morning tells us that it is a chain reaction that has never stopped.

Jesus invites Philip to follow him. Philip is convinced that Jesus is the Messiah, the one about whom Moses and the prophets spoke. Philip enthusiastically invites Nathaniel to meet Jesus, but Nathaniel is skeptical. Nathaniel asks a hard question, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Can anything good come from such a one horse town and cultural backwater? Can the Son of God be such an ordinary person? Can the Word be made flesh in him?

Nathaniel sounds like some people today who feel like they have heard it all before. They know just enough about the gospel to be inoculated from its power. Can the world the Bible portrays be real? Can we trust what Jesus says? Can the promises of God be true? Is there really something to this “business” of Christianity? Does it make sense that the God who created the universe hears my prayers and care about me? Nathaniel’s questions are real. He is a man without deceit or pretense. He says what he thinks even if what he thinks is not what Philip wants to hear.

What Nathaniel finds is someone who knows him better than he knows himself. Jesus says to Nathaniel, “Before Philip called you, I saw you under a fig tree.” What Jesus knows is more than a calendar of Nathaniel’s life. Jesus knows the heart. He says, “Here is an Israelite in whom there is not deceit.” As the Psalmist said of God, “Thou

hast searched me and known me...Thou art acquainted with all my ways.” Even when we are confused about who we are, what our lives mean and where we are going, there is one who already knows us and understands us. Here we meet Jesus who calls us by name and holds our lives in the palms of loving hands.

All Philip says is, “Come and see.” He speaks the same words of invitation that Jesus spoke to Andrew and another disciple. God speaks to us all the time but we do not always hear. Sometimes, all we need is someone to invite us to listen. God speaks to us through others. Do you remember the story of the little boy Samuel who served in the sanctuary at Shiloh with Eli? Samuel is lying upon his cot and hears a voice in the night calling his name. Each time he hears the voice, he thinks it is the old priest Eli calling him to some midnight duty or service. Each time Eli tells the boy he has not called. When Samuel comes to him the third time, Eli knows it is the voice of the Lord calling the young boy. Eli tells him that when the voice calls again he is to say, “Speak, Lord, for your servant hears.”

In countless ways, God is calling our name, but we do not recognize the voice as God. We think it is just a teacher trying to get our attention, a friend in trouble calling for help, a situation at the office that has us baffled, or just another sunset at the end of a long day. We cannot take our spiritual life for granted. We need wise souls around us like Eli to tune our ears to the voice of God. Christ calls you and me to follow him.

Have you ever stopped to think about how you first came to know Jesus Christ? I suspect there were people in your life that prayed for you and sang hymns to you and held you in their loving arms before you even knew it. There were parents or grandparents who brought you to Sunday school or to Scouts or some other activity in which God’s love was communicated to you. There were teachers who believed in you, friends who forgave you and coaches who encouraged you. These were the people who said to you, “You’ve got to see this!”

My own grandparents, who were faithful members of the First Baptist Church of Columbia, often invited me to go to Sunday school and worship with them. They worshipped together every Sunday in the same pew for over 55 years. They wanted me to “come and see” what had sustained them over so many years. I can still remember their Sunday school teacher telling us about Joseph’s coat of many colors and how God protected Joseph through all the dangers he faced. Later, in high school, I remember the words of Dr. Martin Luther King sounding in my ears as an invitation to “come and see” a larger and more inclusive vision of the church in which all people are brothers and sisters in Christ.

This gracious invitation is extended to us not only through others, but also through the Scriptures. The authors of the four gospels wrote them as a kind of invitation to “come and see” Jesus. As the first generation of Christians began to die, the gospel writers wanted new generations of Christians to have the same opportunity to meet Jesus as they did. The gospels were never intended to be a history or biography of Jesus in the same way we might read an account of John Adams, Alexander the Great

or Eleanor Roosevelt. The purpose of the gospels is to allow us to encounter Jesus the risen Lord. We look through the stories to see him; we hear his voice through the words that are written. There is a profound difference between knowing about Jesus and knowing Jesus. The gospels were written by those who were convinced that Jesus was not simply a religious hero who died a martyr's death. He is the Risen Lord! They lived each day in his presence. The Holy Spirit guided them as they wrote down the stories, experiences and sayings of Jesus. When we teach and preach in the church, we are not simply imparting information *about* Jesus but inviting others to *experience* Jesus and to discover in his life the pattern of our own lives. The gospel is not an invitation to know about Jesus; it is an invitation to meet Jesus. In telling the good news of Jesus Christ found in the stories of Scripture, Christ is made present among us.

In his famous book, *The Quest for the Historical Jesus*, the missionary and scholar Dr. Albert Schweitzer wrote the words that form the text of our anthem this morning:

He comes to us as one unknown,
without a name, as of old, by the lakeside
he came to those men who knew him not.
He speaks to us, he speaks the same word:
"Follow thou me!" and sets us to the tasks
which he has to fulfill for our time.
He commands. And to those who obey him,
whether they be wise or simple,
he will reveal himself in the toils, the conflicts, the sufferings
which they shall pass through in his fellowship,
and, as an ineffable mystery, they shall learn who he is.

The Scriptures are given that we may experience through them his mysterious and powerful presence.

Come and see. It is a word spoken to us through others and through the gospels. It is a word spoken by us to others. All God asks you and me to do is to invite others into the presence of Christ and the fellowship of Christ's body. God sends us out with the simple task of saying to others, "come and see." Let God issue a gracious invitation through you. We cannot be faithful to our Lord and live as if we have nothing to share. We have more to offer others than we realize. Our struggles and our pains, our joys and our sorrows, our mended hearts and our restored relationships may be the source of someone else's hope and healing. We have the greatest gift to share—the gift of faith.

"Come and see." Philip invites Nathaniel to join with the other disciples. God speaks to us through one another in the church. Jesus said, "Wherever two or three are gathered together in my name, I am in their midst." Here, we discover Jesus in one another. There are a lot of things that we can learn by ourselves, but there are some things that we can only learn from one another. You can memorize the books of the Bible by yourself, but I do not believe you can learn what it means to love by yourself. You can make a map of Paul's missionary journeys by yourself, but you cannot learn

the meaning of forgiveness by yourself. You can memorize the Twenty-third Psalm by yourself, but you cannot understand the meaning of sacrifice by yourself. We need one another to know Christ and to live together in his presence.

The Swiss physician and psychotherapist Paul Tournier tells of attending a meeting of a group dedicated to the “Medical Care of the Person.” Tournier notes that this group of professionals dedicated to the healing of the total person, tended to be very impersonal in their relationships with one another. At one session a young psychiatrist told of being preoccupied with the problem of death. He said, “We have often discussed death—death in general, death as something abstract...these days I have been thinking about my own death. Last night I had a dream in which I saw myself in this group. Paul Tournier was sitting beside me and he leaned over and said very gently, ‘Don’t think only of death in general, nor of our death, but of his death.’ And I realized that he meant the death of Jesus Christ.” Tournier reports, “Then and there, suddenly, the person of Jesus Christ rose up in our midst—not like a far-off abstract figure, but as one very near and real, the one we are all called to surrender to someday.” (Pp. 20-21, “The Person in the Age of Conformity,” in *Are You Nobody?*)

“Come and see.” What would it be if each one of us committed ourselves in this new year to inviting others to meet Jesus—perhaps by coming to worship, to a class, to youth group, to a Bible study, to Celebration of Hope, to a mission trip, to the Great Banquet, to Bible school, to Christmas benevolence or simply by how we live each day as those who follow him. I suspect that we too would see “Christ rise up in our midst—not like a far-off abstract figure, but as one very near and real...”

Then we would have reason to say, “You’ve got to see this!”