

## Come and See

E2-11, Jan. 15, 2012  
Jn. 1:43-51

Rev. Dr. C. E. Hagen  
Memorial, Afton

After a prologue declaring Jesus the very presence of God come among us,  
events in the Gospel of John unfold swiftly.

John the Baptist tells the priests and Levites who were sent from Jerusalem  
that the Messiah has already come.<sup>1</sup>

*The next day* John the Baptist sees Jesus and announces to all, that he is the one.<sup>2</sup>

*The next day after that,*

Jesus calls Andrew, Peter and an unnamed person to follow him.<sup>3</sup>

Then *the next day* is our gospel reading this morning,  
the calling of Philip and Nathanael.

Four days of action in half a chapter.

It seems the writer of the gospel wants to get on with the story.

Jesus was in the region where John the Baptist was baptizing.

He decides to return to Galilee where he grew up.

He finds Philip, which seems to indicate that he knew about Philip from before  
and goes back to get him before leaving for Galilee.

He says to Philip, "Follow me."

One good way to make disciples of Jesus is for Jesus himself to personally command it.

Hearing straight from the Savior's mouth is quite convincing,  
and Philip follows.

However, 21 centuries later, we don't have that advantage.

How are we today to receive the call to follow Jesus?

Well, a second way is by invitation, the way *Nathanael* heard it.

Philip found Nathanael and told him

that the one all of Israel has been waiting for all these centuries has finally come.

A second way to make disciples is to start with invitation.

This is what I call "Lutheran evangelism."

It is simply inviting someone to experience God in this place.

Philip said to Nathanael, "Come and see!"

And the usual first reaction of those we tell is *resistance*.

Nathanael's first reaction is typical;

Nathanael is skeptical.

"Yeah, right!" thinks Nathanael.

Do you really think if God shows up

he will bother about a town like Nazareth?

Nazareth is a town in the region of Galilee.

Galilee was considered unfit by the rest of the remnants of Israel.

Galilee was the first to fall away from God in the Old Testament,  
chased after other gods

and made it seem OK by giving pagan practices holy names.

Galilee was the descendant of Samaria

which buckled under foreign pressure

and mixed foreign religions with obedience to Yahweh,

and so shaming the Lord and despising God's rule.

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<sup>1</sup> John 1:19-28.

<sup>2</sup> John 1:29-34.

<sup>3</sup> John 1:35-42.

Nazareth, a town in the region,  
 was a dump,  
 a no-account village of those who seemed to be *the least*  
 of those worthy of God

There are those communities that are simply *mean places*.  
 Entire towns develop a culture of being rude,  
 of *intentionally* avoiding helping anyone,  
 of *seeking out* ways to make life difficult for someone else,  
 of criticizing and putting down and speaking ill of others.

They are just mean places to live.  
 The people in general are spiteful and bitter.

It seems Nazareth was such a place.

In the Gospel of Mark,  
 the people of Nazareth “took offense at [Jesus].”<sup>4</sup>  
 They disliked Jesus from the start and Jesus “could do no mighty work there.”  
 Jesus was unable to convince his own home town of Nazareth  
 of the glory that has come among them.

“A prophet is without honor in his own country,” all the gospels say of Jesus.<sup>5</sup>  
 The citizens of Nazareth even tried to throw Jesus off a cliff,  
 they were so angry and mean.<sup>6</sup>

This is the kind of town that Nathanael sneers at,  
 “Can *anything* good come out of Nazareth?”  
 Sometimes you just look in bewilderment and ask whether *anything* can be salvaged.  
 Can anything good come out of the mess?  
 Why even bother if the people themselves don’t make an effort?

It is the question *at the root of salvation* come through Jesus Christ.  
 Can Jesus save *everyone*?  
 Is Christ’s redemption great enough  
 to bring *everyone and anything* into God’s good graces?

There are some places we just will not go.  
 There are some people who just will not change.  
 There are situations that just cannot be tolerated.  
 There are times when we ask, “Can *anything* good come out of Nazareth?”

Notice Philip does not argue.  
 Philip does not get defensive.  
 Philip does not explain or prove a point.  
 Philip does not whip out the Bible and quote supporting passages.  
 Philip does not try to convince.

All he says is, “Come and see!”  
 Experience Jesus for yourself;  
 don’t take my word for it.

So Nathanael goes.  
 But before Nathanael can say a word,  
 Jesus declares Nathanael’s character—a man of no deceit.  
 Nathanael is surprised.  
 He does not recall ever meeting Jesus.  
 Yet Jesus notices.  
 We don’t know what Nathanael was doing under the fig tree.

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<sup>4</sup> Mark 6:1.

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 13:57, Mark 6:4, Luke 4:24, John 4:44.

<sup>6</sup> Luke 4:29.

We do know, though, that rabbis would often teach under fig trees.  
 It could very well be that Nathanael was a rabbi,  
     someone respected enough for people to come and hear,  
     someone forthright and clear about scripture.  
 If so, Nathanael would know the signs of something great.  
 Before Nathanael can say a word,  
     Jesus declares Nathanael's character—a man of no deceit.  
 Nathanael blurts in response, "You are the Son of God. You are the king of Israel."  
 He knows the signs of the great Jewish messianic king who is to come.  
 Nathanael is proclaiming Jesus to be a national hero.  
 But Jesus draws him further.  
     "Do you believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree?"  
     Do you see only kings and heroes?  
 "You will see *greater* things than these," says Jesus.  
 He draws Nathanael into a bigger picture, a greater kingdom.  
     Jesus tells him this is not some national pride we are talking.  
     Jesus tells him he will see nothing less than *heaven opened*.  
     Jesus tells him he will see nothing less than God's reign upon this earth.  
     Jesus tells him he will see God's own kingdom opened up to all creation.  
 Nathanael confesses a human leader.  
 Jesus shows him God.

What does it take to believe?  
 How does anyone come to believe in Jesus?  
 As we see in Nathanael, it depends on what you expect.  
 Nathanael looked for a human leader,  
     a messianic king to deliver Israel from Roman rule,  
     someone to solve the practical problem of government by intruders.  
 Others consider Jesus a mythical concept  
     of what is best and most right,  
     of what is the best of being human.  
 Some see Jesus as a moral example of righteous living.  
     Jesus is an example for us to copy.  
     Jesus has no more bearing on us than that of a role model.  
 Many of us confess Jesus as the Son of God who died for our salvation.  
     That is a mouthful and somewhat confusing.  
     What is salvation and what does dying have to do with it?  
     We confess Jesus, but that is not the same as knowing Jesus.  
 This gospel reading does not try to explain who Jesus is.  
 Instead, these scriptures invite us to come on a journey,  
     to explore and observe and watch what takes place.  
 They do not ask us to believe before knowing truth.  
 They do not ask us to make a decision one way or another.  
 They ask us to simply notice, to meet Jesus.  
 "Come and see."

I hear often, "I don't go to church because I don't believe."  
 Such people have it backwards.  
     They don't believe because they don't go to church.  
 Belief is not an intellectual exercise or personal decision.  
 Belief is the result of experiencing of someone holy.  
 That experience of Jesus happens in holy community that is church.  
 Experiencing God happens in church.  
 Belief comes about as we come among these people called Memorial Lutheran Church.  
 What does it take to believe?  
 It takes showing up and seeing Jesus.

Belief is difficult because we are blinded by preconceptions.  
 Like Nathanael, we see the church as an institution  
     that is governed by elected officials  
     who, hopefully, know the wishes of constituents.  
 We see church as an organization of rules, regulations, policies and procedures.  
 We see church as something to which to join if we feel like it,  
     and something from which to get good feelings.

While we talk about “joining” church,  
     in reality church is an experience into which we are invited.

Here we meet God.  
 Here we experience the mercy and forgiveness of Jesus.  
 Here we are part of something bigger than ourselves,  
     part of something more holy than our best intentions,  
     part of something more caring than our best efforts.

Here we experience Jesus.

What do you expect when you come to church?  
     Some strangers you recognize but don’t really know,  
     all mulling around doing stuff?

What do you expect when you come to church?  
     Maybe some words that make it OK to continue selfish, self-gratifying attitudes?

What do you expect when you come to church?  
     Maybe a good feeling, a sugar-high,  
     saccharine sanctimony and cute quotes from the Internet?

What do you expect when you come to church?  
 If you expect to see Jesus, if you expect God to show up,  
     if you expect the Holy Spirit to come in power and might and glory and right,  
     you will see *holy things*,  
     you will see *saints*,  
     you will see *wonders and miracles* taking place in ordinary things,  
     you will see Memorial Lutheran Church  
     as a holy place where God meets you and me on sacred ground.

And you *will see* greater things than these!  
 Listen to Philip.  
 “Come and see.”