

Pastor Gwen's Message
2nd Sunday after Epiphany
"Come and See"
Sunday, January 14, 2024

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. **AMEN**

I don't know about you, but I love the season after Epiphany. The word *epiphany* means to uncover or to reveal. Jesus has been revealed as the Messiah, as the Savior of the world. Last week we heard of Jesus' baptism in the River Jordan by John, where God made it quite clear that Jesus was His Son, the Beloved, with whom God was well pleased. Jesus has come to bring the Holy Spirit to all, just like the dove that descended on Jesus as he came up out of the waters. Our Scripture texts today remind us of how we are called into God's world.

First Samuel, the young boy hears a voice in the night and wrongly assumes that it is Eli, the priest. But rather it is God calling Samuel, calling him to speak the divine word. Even though he was just a boy, Samuel responds obediently as Eli has taught him. And so, begins the prophetic ministry of young Samuel.

Our Gospel lesson for today is the calling of Philip and his friend, Nathanael. These disciples will then invite others to Jesus. In fact, Philip is the first to do that when he asks his friend to "Come and See".

This morning, I invite you to be called to be one of Jesus' disciples. Our opening hymn said it well, that we need to listen, for God is always calling us through His word. So, think with me for a minute, if you feel called to be a disciple, how did God call you. Did someone invite you to church, to come to worship with them on a Sunday or was it just assumed by your parents that you would go to church? I think most of us were marked with the cross of Christ and had the Holy Spirit enter us through the waters of baptism when we were young. Today for a good part of the world, that is not the case.

I do know that for some of you it is very difficult to invite someone to church and for some it comes quite naturally.

Well, today in our reading Philip witnesses to Nathanael, that Jesus, the son of Joseph of Nazareth is coming. He is the one that the prophets and the law of Moses talked about. Nathanael has a smart-aleck comment to Philip that nothing good comes from Nazareth. Notice here that Philip does not argue with Nathanael, but instead invited him to come and see for himself. This is a great tactic. I have learned over time that you usually cannot argue people into Christianity. One way to

convince a man of the supremacy of Christ is to have him confronted by Jesus. And what better place to have a person see Jesus than in worship. Another place would be to be around a disciple of Jesus where one can see Jesus at work through that person. But that personal invitation is most important, a personal witness and an invitation. Philip does that, "Come and See". And so, Nathanael does just that. And we see Jesus taking the initiative here. He tells Nathanael that He saw him under the fig tree contemplating life. Jesus also compliments Nathanael, "that he is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!"

And so, Jesus shows that he knows Nathanael. After all Jesus knows things otherwise known only to God himself. And with this greeting from Jesus, Nathanael now sees that Jesus is the one sent from God. In fact, in his acknowledgment of that fact, he uses three titles for Jesus.

First, he calls Jesus Rabbi. This is an honorable title that implies teacher, yet rather ordinary as there are many rabbis. Then Nathanael says that Jesus is the Son of God which is a messianic title. Not sure if he knew what he actually was saying as the idea of a messiah was to be a warrior like King David. This is reiterated in calling Jesus the King of Israel. Most likely again thinking of Jesus in the mold of King David, a great but very human king. Jesus knows this all and so he responds that Nathanael will see greater things. He "will see heaven opened up and angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man." The light is now on for Nathanael. As he agrees to follow Jesus, by listening he will see the message of Jesus in a clearer, more illumined way. The light will get brighter for Nathanael so he can see more clearly, he can follow more closely.

And that folks is why we are here this morning. To get epiphanized, is that a word. Well, to get to see God more clearly. We are here to ask questions and get our questions answered about Jesus, just as Nathanael did when he asked both Philip and Jesus his questions. The questions that were all about his life. Today many people in our world are searching for something. Most don't know what it is, whether it is fame, fortune, beauty, or happiness. They ask the wrong questions, just as Nathanael did until he got it. It is not about ME; it is about God. God's message is what will change the world and to be a part of that you have to give up your ME! When we are called, we are called to be God's children and live in his kingdom right here on earth, of course with the promise of eternal life for eternity.

All 12 of the disciples were called to follow Jesus and they came and saw, what could be if they gave up their lives to be His disciples.

Let me shift gears a bit and think about the church, our church. I can remember being asked at my call interview how I would get more people into the pews on a Sunday morning. Can't remember what I replied, but now, after over 12 years, I know at least part of the answer. It is not about me. It is about God. My job, our job, is to ask others to come and see. God will work in their hearts. That job is way, way bigger than I am and far above my pay grade.

I cannot tell you how many seminars or classes I have been invited to or books that folks have suggested to me that teach the elusive key to growing membership in the church. And many churches try to follow these teachers. They arrange great music, have a simple message, nothing too radical to grasp. They try to address the social concerns in their community and the yearning

for finding the meaning of life. And you see this is all backwards. It is not about us. It is about God.

The goal of the church is not to be measured in how many butts are in the pews, but rather how many disciples of Jesus we have. Our goal here should not be to grow the church. If that is our goal, we will commit our resources and energy toward getting more people. And yes, we would like to have more people at CTS, don't get me wrong.

In fact, it was probably about 6 or 7 years ago that I was told by the pastor's review committee that I needed to slow down. We just could not do all the stuff I had in mind and put before them. They felt tired and wanted to sit back and relax and get some new members so that they could step up and do some of the work. Between caring for the church property, quilting, men's group, decorating for the holidays, working on the budget, or planning a mission outreach, they were spread too thin and wanted help. The point is the mission of the church, is not about you. It is not about making your life easier. It is about God, His redeeming work in the world, about living that out and making room for others to join us in that living. And yes, people will come when we ask them to come and see, especially when we are excited about sharing God. Growth is a nice side effect, but it should not be the goal. The goal is getting to know God and living our lives in response to the loving grace He has bestowed on each one of us.

And when Nathaniel figured that out, the light when on so to speak, he was able to grasp who Jesus was and realize that Jesus was what he was looking for all along. It's not about professional success, material wealth, self-actualization, or societal prestige. In fact, I have found that if I stop thinking about those things and rather ask myself what God is leading me to do, there is more peace, happiness, in my life. Because it is always, always about God.

Come and see the radical message of living life as servants, of turning this world's view of success on its head. It is about taking up your cross and following no matter what the cost, just so you can be one little part of the grand and wonderful work of God to transform this world. God's love for us is amazing. I will always remember this passage by CD Buechner where he talks about our relationship with God. He says, "there exists that place where our deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet. God wants to lead us there and so calls each of us by name." Each of us by name. Isn't that awesome. It is not always a road that is well paved, in fact it is often snow-covered with wind chills at immeasurable lows, but yet God calls us to Himself.

And with that being said, I do know that I am preaching to the choir today. But we must continue to come and see. We need to worship together. We cannot begin to take for granted that God will feed us even if we don't show up for dinner? We need to be a people of worship for it is where we are fed God's message through word and sacrament. And how can we spread the Good News of Jesus Christ with others. How can we ask them to "Come and See" if we ourselves are not coming and seeing on a regular basis.

My hope for 2024 is that we will gather here each and every Sunday to see Jesus. I pray that I will be inspired to help you see Jesus each week, that our music enhances that experience so we can clearly see the God who is our hope and our life. This is the time folks. Time to Come and see, and to give praise and glory to God alone! **AMEN**