

Sermon 110517 Discipleship  
Scripture John 1: 43-51  
Sermon Title- "Come and See"

Our Gospel lesson from John this morning describes the beginning moments of Jesus' ministry. Prior to this story in John's Gospel is only the establishment of Jesus as God coming to the world in human form and the Baptism of Jesus. Our story today ends the first chapter of the Gospel of John. He is gathering his disciples, his followers. This discipleship story helps set up the rest of the story that John is telling. It is also a story that has you and me in it.

It starts with Jesus making the decision to go to Galilee. Jesus finds Philip and says to Philip, "Follow me." Philip is instantly a disciple. The divine power of Jesus to change people's lives jumps out at us here. Jesus doesn't try to convince Philip of anything. Jesus touches Philip's soul and for Philip there is no turning away.

Philip immediately becomes an evangelist for Jesus. Philip finds Nathaniel. They engage in an amusing and memorable dialog. Philip tells Nathaniel that Jesus is the one the Hebrew Scriptures wrote would come and that he is the son of Joseph from Nazareth. Nathaniel then amusingly responds, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"

Now, John has already made it clear to us the readers that Jesus is not from Nazareth, but from God. Jesus is from above. We are from below. But Nathaniel, who doesn't yet get it with Jesus, can't imagine

the Messiah prophesized in the Hebrew Scriptures would come from such an insignificant place as Nazareth.

I tell ya, you gotta love Nathaniel. He sounds like such a regular guy. He doesn't have a clue about political correctness. He is an honest guy who just puts it out there.

I grew up in Weymouth. Weymouth was and largely still is a blue collar, working class town heavily populated by Irish and Italian. It sits next to Hingham, a very affluent, old money, architecturally gorgeous town. Weymouth is definitely the other side of the tracks from Hingham. I'll promise you that someone from Hingham would say, "Can anything good come out of Weymouth?" We used to make fun of Hingham by saying things like, "You can tell the girls from Hingham. They're the ones with the tans under their noses." Of course, it was all in good fun without a bit of resentment.

Nathaniel is a real person speaking like real people talk. You can trust Nathaniel. Jesus said even before Nathaniel met Jesus that Nathaniel is without deceit. After Nathaniel's question about Jesus coming from Nazareth, Philip responds simply, "Come and see."

Philip knows that he's not going to convince Nathaniel of anything. He knows that all Nathaniel has to do is experience Jesus and he will be forever changed just like Philip was himself. He does no selling, attempts no explanation. He just arranges the meeting. "Come and see." Nathaniel, sure enough, becomes a disciple as soon as he

meets Jesus. Nathaniel declares to Jesus, “You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” The story closes with Jesus telling Nathaniel what is in store for him, “You will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.”

Remember at the beginning of this message, I said that both you and me are in this story? Well, I see you all as Nathaniel and me as Philip.

Being a pastor has many rewards and many challenges. It is interesting when I see family and friends and tell them about my ministry. There are many misconceptions about my work. I had a niece say to me, “You just go there on Sundays to give a speech, right? Do you have a real job during the week?” I tried to describe to her the various activities that I do as pastor, but I don’t think she got it. I don’t think I captured what the nature of my work really is.

I think Philip captures the nature of my work in this morning’s lesson. Philip is a man whose faith has been brought to life by Jesus Christ. He doesn’t try to sell Jesus to Nathaniel; he just arranges the meeting. “Come and see,” he says.

That ultimately is what I try to do in my ministry. What ministers do, when acting faithfully, no matter how well or poorly, is to arrange the meeting. We bring God to our people, and we bring our people to God. Come and see. God handles the rest, but only if the person is open to having God in his or her life.

Why do I see you all as Nathaniel? Well, Nathaniel has qualities of honesty, genuineness, integrity, and open-mindedness. This is not a story where God takes a miserable sinner and turns him into a saint. This is one of those equally remarkable cases where God takes a person who is praiseworthy and turns him into something even better, a disciple. Jesus already knows that Nathaniel has integrity before the meeting. Jesus can read people's hearts. He is the light that illuminates people- he not only gives each person light; he sees each person in his or her true light.

I have known some bad people in my day. I have known thieves and cruel people. That's not who I find here at Union Church. The people I come across here have their flaws but are good and decent people to begin with. These are good people who know that coming here can make them better. These are people open to the revelation of Jesus Christ. I get to say, come and see, and let God do the rest.

Of course, the most extraordinary character in the story is Jesus Christ himself. When Jesus arrives at the scene, there is no obvious indication that he is anymore than a man, Jesus of Nazareth. In the Gospel, he has yet to perform a miracle, shown no sign, and engaged in no teaching. He has not made a single proclamation about the reign of God.

Yet, he arrives, says to Philip, "Follow me," and Philip starts his new life of discipleship. It is shocking to the sensibilities that this man

wakens in others their awareness that they are in the presence of God. The sheer presence of Christ draws Philip and Nathaniel in. Jesus reveals God. Jesus doesn't call them to mission, he gives them an epiphany, the 'Aha moment' that God is present in him.

Jesus is the point of contact between the finite and the infinite. He ties time and eternity together. Jesus is the place where the heavens open up and the glory of God is revealed. Philip and Nathaniel are reborn in Christ. They are not isolated examples of discipleship; they are the early pioneers of Christian faith.

This extraordinary story is also a sign of God's desire to be in relationship with us. God in Jesus reaches out to us and invites us to into a new life. To have God in your life is to be changed, reborn. That transformation does not happen with a change of behavior. It happens by making yourself available to Christ and his divine presence. To experience the glory of God is to be available to Jesus. But, I'm not going to try to convince you of that. I'll just say, "come and see."

AMEN