

January 14, 2018

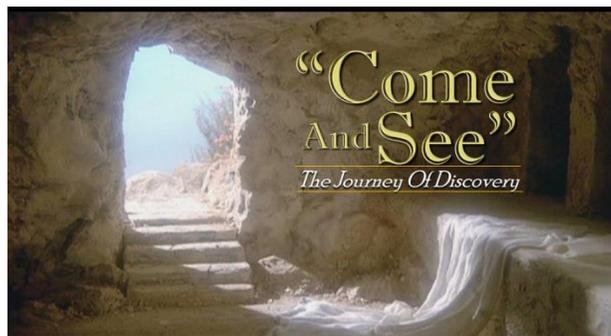
Year B – 2nd Sunday of Epiphany

1 Samuel 3:1-20

Psalm 139:1-5, 12-17

1 Corinthians 6:12-20

John 1:43-51



COME AND SEE

Our discussion this week is on the concluding part of John 1. The author declared his purpose for the entire gospel in John 20:31: It was written “... *that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name.*”¹ John 1 presents Jesus first as the Christ, the eternal Son of God, and the creator and source of all things (v.1-18). Then, following the witness of John the Baptist, John 1 begins the historical account of the life of Jesus on earth (v.25-51). The chapter begins in eternity and ends in Judea, at a particular place and time. It begins with the end of the old covenant, and ends with the beginning of the new covenant. It begins with the Son of God, and ends with the Son of man.

You could say John 1 commences to be a historical account at v.19. On a certain day in history, at Bethany beyond the Jordan (v.28) (not the Bethany near Jerusalem where Lazarus lived), John the Baptist (not John the Apostle, who wrote the gospel) began to proclaim the Messiah. “*I baptize with water,*” he said, “*But among you stands one whom you do not know, even he who comes after me, the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.*” (v.26-27). From this you might get the idea that John the Baptist saw Jesus, as most of his followers would come to see him, as the Son of David, coming in the power of God to become king and raise Israel to its former glory. But this was *not* how he saw Jesus.

On the next day John was baptizing. He saw Jesus coming and said, “*Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!*” (v.29). John was a prophet – the last of a long succession of men who lived before Christ was born but foresaw his coming. John got the facts straight from the source. He did not see coming toward him a man who would conquer the Romans. He saw the Lamb of God, who, sacrificing his life, would remove the burden of sin from a lost and dying world, in accordance with Isaiah’s prophecy:

Like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people? (Isaiah 53:7-8).

John himself fulfilled the prophecy in Isa 40:3, “*In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.*” Review Luke 3:1-20. John didn’t tell his listeners to sharpen their swords and prepare for war. He told them to repent. He didn’t teach them to resist the authorities. He taught them to be kind to everyone. John was a *prophet*. He prepared *the way of the Lord*. Those who obeyed John would be prepared to receive what the entire world needs – not another king, but a *Savior*.

On the second “next day,” (v.35) John the Apostle and Andrew, who had been disciples of the Baptist, went and stayed with Jesus. Andrew also brought his brother Peter to Jesus. These men were ready to follow Christ. When they did, and were with Christ, and saw how good and kind he was to all men, their hearts were warmed. Living this way began to seem like a really good idea. “In order to be blessed,” Charles Spurgeon said, “all you have to do is be with Jesus.” Without Jesus, you are back to square one.

We come now to the third and final “next day” (v.43), where our lesson begins. On that day, Jesus left the place of his baptism in the Jordan. The Bible says he “decided to go to Galilee.”

John 1:43-45. *The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. And he found Philip and said to him, “Follow me.”* ⁴⁴*Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter.* ⁴⁵*Philip found Nathanael, and said to him, “We have found him of whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.”*

¹ Bible quotations are from the RSV.

• *Jesus decided to go to Galilee* (v.43). Jesus decided to return to his home and family and friends in Galilee, where he had grown up and had *increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man*. (Luke 2:52). He knew his destiny awaited him in the south, at Jerusalem, but first he would go to his people.

• *He found Philip* (v.43). Philip was from *Bethsaida*, a fishing village on the Sea of Galilee near Capernaum. The name means *place of fishing*. Philip appears three times after this in John's gospel (6:5, 12:21, 14:8), and in Acts 1:13 after our Lord's resurrection. (There is another Philip in Acts also, "Philip the Evangelist," in Acts 6, 8, and 21.)

Some, like Philip, are found by Jesus. Others come seeking him as Nicodemus did in John 3, and still others simply begin to believe he is who he claims to be. The Bible teaches that these things are equivalent. If you have found Christ and believe in him, you have been found by him. No man saves himself.

• *Philip found Nathanael* (v.45). Nathanael would become the next disciple. His name is not mentioned with the apostles in the other three gospels, but *Bartholomew* is listed instead (see Matt 10:3, etc.), so we assume that the names *Nathanael* and *Bartholomew* refer to the same apostle.

John 1:46-51. *Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see."* ⁴⁷*Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!"* ⁴⁸*Nathanael said to him, "How do you know me?" Jesus answered him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you."* ⁴⁹*Nathanael answered him, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"* ⁵⁰*Jesus answered him, "Because I said to you, I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You shall see greater things than these."* ⁵¹*And he said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man."*

• *"Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"* (v.47). Nathanael lived in Cana, 10 miles north of Nazareth (see John 21:2). He apparently did not think much of Nazareth. But here at least was a man who spoke his mind – an honest man, though he might not have a future in politics. We might have said, "Who needs a cynic like this?" But when Jesus saw him he liked him immediately and said, *"Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!"* Whoever you are, Jesus sees potential in you – the promise of great things!

• *"Come and see"* (v.46). This is the second time we see these words. They were spoken first in v.39 to Andrew and John by Jesus, then in v.46 to Nathanael by Philip. They are important words because in them lies the difference between (1) hearing about Jesus and (2) *coming* to know him and *seeing* what he is like.

• *"When you were under the fig tree, I saw you"* (v.48). To the Jews, *a man under his fig tree* was a man at peace. In the days of Solomon, according to 1 Ki 4:25, *Judah and Israel dwelt in safety, from Dan even to Beersheba, every man under his vine and under his fig tree*.

This raises a question: Why did Philip go to Nathanael rather than someone else from Bethsaida? No one really knows. Perhaps Nathanael was a man who prayed for Messiah to come, and Philip knew this and said to Nathanael, *"We have found him of whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote ... come and see!"* In any case, it is a testimony any Christian may use: "I have found Jesus Christ ... come and see!"

• *"Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"* (v.49). Nathanael's rating of Nazareth improved instantly. Why this sudden change of heart? Had Nathanael been praying for the Savior of Israel to come, and did he now hear in the reply of Jesus the words, "You have found him"? Today, when people realize they are sinners and can't do anything about it, and come to be forgiven at the cross, we begin to say something like these words of Nathanael, *"Rabbi, you really are the Son of God!"*

• *"You will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man"* (v.51). Most commentators interpret this with reference to Jacob's dream in Gen 28, saying that Christ opened a new way from man to God. *"I am the way, the truth, and the life,"* Jesus said to Thomas after the last supper. *"No one comes to the Father, but by me."* It was then that Philip said to him, *"Lord, show us the Father, and we shall be satisfied."* Jesus said, *"He who has seen me has seen the Father"* (John 14:6ff).

Thus, John 1 begins with the Son of God, and ends with the Son of Man – the Way into God's presence for those who have responded to the simple words anyone can understand and act upon: *"Come and see!"*