

Baptism of the Lord

9th January 2022

John 1:35-46

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Come and See

Have you ever dreamed of just walking away from your job to do something entirely new? A high school friend of mine posted on Facebook recently about how, after spending 30 years going to college and law school, starting a law practice, building a client base, and establishing himself in his field, he decided that he was closing his practice and starting a career as a writer. Walking away from something in which he no longer found fulfillment, he wanted to spend the next phase of his life pursuing something about which he was passion-

ate.

We're probably all aware that people are walking away from jobs right now in unprecedented numbers. Some of that has to do with a unwillingness to continue working in jobs that don't even provide a living wage. Some of it, I suspect, has to do with the ways in which COVID has brought to the forefront our human frailty and mortality, a realization from which medical advances have tried to insulate us for the past century. Life is short. Our days on earth are numbered. Perhaps money should not supersede joy as our ultimate life's goal.

Our reading this morning from John's gospel is the calling of the disciples. One by one, people seem to be leaving behind their fishing nets, their tax collecting gigs, or whatever they were doing and following a rabbi named Jesus. And I love the way the invitation to follow is portrayed here. First, a couple of John's disciples are intrigued by Jesus. So they ask him where he's headed, what he's doing. Jesus responds by inviting them to "come and see."

Later, Jesus has picked up a disciple named Philip, and they're traveling through a village. Word of Jesus has spread to someone named Nathaniel. But Nathaniel is skeptical. "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" he asks Philip.

Philip responds simply as Jesus did. "Come and see."

Come and see. It's a great invitation. It implies that

what is going on is more than can easily be captured in words. A listing of facts, of details, won't do justice to this thing the disciples are experiencing as they follow Jesus. Instead, as Philip tells Nathaniel, you must come and see this thing for yourself. "Come and see" communicates that something unique is happening—something that must be savored to be fully appreciated.

"Come and see" also broadens community. Philip, in this case, has experienced something transformative. Nathaniel is dubious, but Philip's invitation to "come and see" communicates more than just a desire to prove Nathaniel's skepticism is misplaced. "Come and see" in this case means, "come join us. Come and be a part of this thing that changed the trajectory of my life. Come and be in community with

me and with others who have left behind those things that didn't bring us joy, and we are now seeking a better path together."

"Come and see." We all probably extend invitations like this to others:

"We tried this new restaurant, and it was delicious. Would you like to join us there next Friday?"

Or, "I just finished this fantastic book and would love to hear what you think about it. Would you like to borrow my copy?" Indeed, that's pretty much how our Thursdays with Jesus book group keeps going. We have a list 30 deep of books we've read and are excited to share with others.

I also think "come and see" may be the best endorsement we can offer others about our church family. Here's this place where we're all trying to come together and reflect on cultural and

environmental issues, where we can brainstorm ways to address poverty and climate change here in our community, where we can support one another in a quest for spiritual connection with God and with creation. Come and see!

It's a simple invitation, but it can have an impact beyond just our local community. Early on in the pandemic, when we quickly shifted to online worship, we picked up a handful of people who I've never met but who found us online thanks to Google and tags on our website like "welcome, inclusive, and More Light."

In at least two cases, someone who joined us online, had never been to this place in person, and was not local to east Tennessee realized that while our church might be anomalous in our area, we aren't the only pro-

gressive and inclusive church in the country. Because of our invitation to “come and see,” two people who didn’t have a church community of their own discovered that places like this do exist, and consequently connected with local churches in their area.

Which is all to celebrate another way your witness as a church reaches beyond those of us here on a given Sunday morning, and also to encourage us to continue to invite others to “come and see” what goes on here.

“Come and see.” That’s how Philip responds to a skeptical Nathaniel—with an invitation to step into the unknown with hopeful expectation, with a promise that whatever lies ahead, they’ll experience it together.

I’ve been thinking about “come and see” for our church as we enter this now third year of COVID and

what that looks like for us. I’d love to be able to say “come and see” what our church is doing this year, but it feels like there’s a lot of uncertainty around that right now. While that may be true, though, it doesn’t diminish the spirit of the invitation.

Nathaniel didn’t know what was going to happen when he followed. It seems he was even somewhat pessimistic about the possibilities—“Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Can anything good come out of 2022? “Come and see” can be an invitation that we have something exciting going on here we want to share, but it can also be an affirmation of faith in an unknown future. I would even argue that Philip, Nathaniel, and all those others who followed Jesus probably had no idea about what their futures would end up being. But

they had faith that, when experienced together, it would be something positive.

What does that mean for us? I think it means that even without certainty about this year, we can still have faith in the God of this community and the work we do together. For example, we've participated in Tri-Pride for several years, not because we're trying to convince people to join our church, but because we want people to know that there are churches who don't believe that sexuality or gender identity are barriers either to God's love or to welcome and inclusion within a Christian community. Whether or not we get to do Tri-Pride in 2022, we will still find ways to spread that message.

I don't know what Easter will look like for us this year. We weren't in the sanctuary for Easter the past two years. But we're still going to find a

way to proclaim that resurrection is about more than an empty tomb 2000 years ago. We're going to find ways to spread the message that Easter is both a promise and a faith that new life happens in this world every day, and we are all invited to experience it.

Indeed, I think it's probably always been the case that we never really knew what "come and see" would mean, but like the folks in our story, we just had faith that it would be something beautiful worth experiencing. Maybe what we're discovering is that we don't ever know the details of what is to come. But we trust that it will be worth experiencing and that it will be better experienced together. And we can have faith that God will be there.

Let's "come and see" what 2022 holds for us. For our church. For our lives. I don't

know. But “come and see” is a great way to start the year together with hope, with expectations, and most of all, with community. Blessed be. Amen.


