

January 14, 2018

## **COME AND SEE**

### PRAYER

May the words of my mouth be meditations of our hearts and be always acceptable unto Thee, O Lord our strength and our redeemer.

AMEN

### SERMON

Today we observe the second Sunday in Epiphany. The season of Epiphany is about how Jesus reveals himself to the world. Reveals himself as the Messiah, the Christ. Reveals himself as the son of man and reveals himself as the son of God, Savior, and Redeemer of the world. Last week, it began with the baptism of Jesus from John where the heavens opened, the Holy Spirit descended upon him, and the voice from heaven proclaimed, "This is my son, the beloved, with whom I am well pleased." It is not unlikely that Phillip was one of the witnesses to that revealing of who Jesus is. He along with Andrew and Peter, some of the others possibly James and John, were probably followers of John. They were probably present when this took place. And so, they had already gotten a glimpse of who this Jesus is. Recognizing him, identifying him as the one that they were to look for and to ultimately find.

And so, when Jesus after his 40 days and 40 nights in the desert, comes back and goes back to Galilee, there he finds Andrew and Peter, James and John and Phillip. When he finds Phillip, when he sees Phillip there. He calls him, "Come and follow me." An invitation to be part of that most unique of inner circles that we know as the disciples and the apostles.

And Phillip's first response is not only to follow, to accept that invitation but to also go and get Nathaniel and invite him to come along as well. Which in one case is pretty brazen. He had just been invited himself. As far as we know, Jesus didn't send an invitation that said, "Bring a friend." (Laughter)

But his instinct is to go and to find Nathaniel and to invite him to come along so that he can experience this person Jesus, son of Joseph. Who has been identified for him in what he has accepted as the Christ, the Messiah. And Nathaniel is really completely underwhelmed by the introduction. We have found the one that is to come, the one that is to be the Christ. And it is Jesus, son of Joseph of Nazareth, and Nathaniel evidently is aware of the Nazareth reputation because they didn't have much of one.

It was a little backwater town in Galilee. It didn't have anything that really made it outstanding. And so, when Nathaniel hears that he is underwhelmed. Can anything really good come out of Nazareth? But he didn't let that stop him, that introduction that he was given. And his first impressions of what that meant didn't deter him from coming. He wanted to at least come because Phillip's response was, "Well come and see. Come and see for yourself. Make your own evaluation. Do not depend on what you think you know about Nazareth or what you think you might know about Jesus. Come and see. Experience who he is and let that determine how you will respond."

And of course, we know that Nathaniel did in fact get up and go with Phillip and as they are approaching Jesus. Jesus sees him and says, "There indeed is an Israelite without deceit." Now even though Nathaniel didn't think much of Nazareth he thought pretty good of himself. Because he accepted that pretty quickly. Well how did you get to know me. Because he knew himself to be an Israelite without deceit

evidently. And Jesus responds again, “I saw you before Phillip came to you, when you were sitting under the fig tree.” And for me I used to read that I think he could have walked by and seen me. It didn’t make a whole lot of sense to me. But it was enough for Nathaniel to say, “Rabbi, you are the son of God and the King of Israel.”

What was revealed to Nathaniel went far beyond what the words Jesus spoke would mean for you or me. But it meant to Nathaniel that this was indeed one that he needed to follow. That this was indeed one who was beyond what he had experienced before.

When I read this account in John and consider the season of Epiphany, I am reminded that most of us come to Jesus through an invitation. Come and see. We hear about Jesus as young children and if you look at the world today, how Jesus is presented can vary widely. And sometimes we hear about Jesus, our response may well be like Nathaniel’s. Can anything good come out of that part of the world? Who is the Jesus really? Why should I take my time, make an effort to come and hear who this is or follow in any way, shape, or form this Jesus? Because sometimes the Jesus that is presented, that we are introduced to is not a glowing picture.

If you were to follow or to be introduced to Jesus as members of Westboro Baptist Church introduce him as one who hates certain segments of the people in the world. That would not be a Jesus that I would want to follow or choose to follow in any way, shape, or form. I have seen Jesus portrayed or introduced as a racist. That he loves the whites but not other colored people. And he is only for them. I have seen Jesus introduced as one who is a liberator and if you have any influence or authority at all, that Jesus is against you and for those who are oppressed. That is not my experience.

And we like Nathaniel sometimes have to go beyond and get beyond the introduction of who Jesus is by someone else. Many times, the Jesus that is presented is the one that individual needs or wants but not always the greatest reflection of who Jesus is. And once we hear that message to come or that invitation to come we have to listen very carefully to what Phillip said to Nathaniel. Well come and see. Evaluate for yourself. Experience Jesus for who Jesus is. Don't depend solely on what someone else is telling you or who Jesus is for them. Because Jesus is presented in so many different ways, some very positive and some pretty negative.

I was introduced to Jesus as one who loves the little children. I like that introduction and that works for a while. But I also discovered that to come and see is to come and immerse oneself in the scriptures that tells the story. Not just about Jesus, how the world will develop to be ready to receive Jesus. And not to end at that point but how Jesus and God have continued to reveal who Jesus is to the world over the centuries, over the millennia.

It has a journey of following Jesus, coming and seeing to know Jesus as I know Jesus now. And it is not that simplified version of Jesus but a Jesus who really deals with the changes of the world, and the changes of humanity and of humanity over the centuries and over the millennia. I have seen it even in my lifetime that very short period of over 62 years and it comes from coming and seeing.

It comes from reading the story and understanding the story more deeply over and over again. And trying to make that relevant to others. It is about continuing to invite people to come and to see and experience this Jesus who even in the face of adversity, dealt with people as they were whether they were a tax collector, a prostitute, a high priest, a Samaritan, a Samaritan woman. Always engaging in them

and going beyond their surface issues to come and to see. And to come and to know who God is at that deeper level. And to grow in that process.

John says Nathaniel went from being very skeptical from being about anything good coming out of Nazareth to making that profound, "You are the son of God, you are the King of Israel." In my life, I have moved from this Jesus who kind of likes this group and not that group to one where Jesus is there with each of us. That Jesus' love is for all of us and each of us. And that we are called as followers to allow that love and concern. That readiness to be with people whoever they are, wherever they are and to invite them to come and be a part of this community that is created.

That is how I see Jesus now. That is not how I saw Jesus even when I was first ordained and yet by continuing to engage, by continuing to follow how I see Jesus, how I experienced Jesus has grown and expanded. And that is the path that we all walk. It is a path of revelation, it is a path of Epiphany where it doesn't happen all at once in that first introduction. But as we are introduced or reintroduced to different aspects of Jesus that goes beyond our first conceptions, our first readings, our first understandings.

We are called as God's children. We are called as citizens of God's kingdom. We are called as followers. To continue the journey. To look more deeply. To listen more profoundly to who Jesus is and what Jesus is doing in the lives of people around us. For it is in that listening, it is in that following, it is in that reading that we grow. That light dawns upon us day after day, leading us deeper and deeper into the love of God. Into the redemption and salvation that is offered in Jesus Christ. And it is that new understanding, that debt of understanding that we are then called to ask others and to invite others. Come and see. Come and

experience. Allow the love of God and Jesus Christ to shine a light on your world so that you many see it as God sees it. So that you may experience it the way God wants you to experience life.

Gregory Hein – Rector

Renee' Evans – Transcriber