

COME AND SEE
A Sermon by Rev. Marci Glass
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John 1:29-51

The Lamb of God

The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.’ I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel.” And John testified, “I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God.”

The First Disciples of Jesus

The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, “Look, here is the Lamb of God!” The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, “What are you looking for?” They said to him, “Rabbi” (which translated means Teacher), “where are you staying?” He said to them, “Come and see.” They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o’clock in the afternoon. One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. He first found his brother Simon and said to him, “We have found the Messiah” (which is translated Anointed). He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, “You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas” (which is translated Peter).

Jesus Calls Philip and Nathanael

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Follow me.” Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth.” Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.” When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, “Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!” Nathanael asked him, “Where did you get to know me?” Jesus answered, “I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.” Nathanael replied, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” Jesus answered, “Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these.” And he said to him, “Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.”

OUR TEXT FROM JOHN'S GOSPEL TODAY gives us another picture of how we are called together into community. It begins with John the Baptist's account of Jesus' baptism, which is closely connected to the calling of the disciples.

And we know about the disciples. They are not called because they have it all together or because they bring with them particular crime fighting skills. We know that they say and do the wrong things all the time. But they are better together than any of them are alone.

And sometimes they get it right too.

In this account, they recognize Jesus for who he is. "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" They proclaim his identity at the very beginning of his ministry, perhaps even calling him into his role and his better nature. And then they invite others to come and see and join them on the journey.

The community Jesus creates comes about because of **non anxious invitation**. Inviting people to see Jesus is not a popularity contest or a numbers game where we measure victory by budgets, attendance, or other measures.

John the Baptizer points Jesus out to two of his own disciples—"Look, here is the Lamb of God!"—and they immediately leave John to follow Jesus. John's testimony was worth something, it seems. John's testimony was also self-sacrificial. If all his disciples start following Jesus instead of following him, the membership of John's church is going to go down and how will he pay the bills, hire a youth director, etc, etc?

Jesus' response to these new people following him is different than we might expect from some people today. He doesn't say "**YES! I've got two more! I've got more disciples than anyone! I've stolen some of John's congregation and so my church will be the biggest church in Israel!**"

He doesn't ask them what they can do for him. *"Is one of you, by chance, a guitarist? I could use a praise band at the early service"*.

He doesn't ask what their qualifications for ministry are.

He asks them, "**what are you looking for?**"

I don't think they have an answer for him. They just knew that if the Lamb of God showed up, they should follow him. And Jesus invites them to "come and see".

They didn't have to sign a contract or a non-compete clause. They were, we imagine, free to leave at any point, to "**go and not see**".

American Christians, people like us, have not been the best at non-anxious invitation in recent years. There is a strand of Christianity that wants to bring people into the fold so the people won't end up going to hell. Or we act like if you don't see things exactly the same way we do, you're wrong. I suspect that's not most of us, but perhaps some of us have been on the other side of an **invitation** that felt like more of an **imperative**.

From what some of you have told me, I know there is also a reticence to invite people to come and see because we don't want to be a jerk. We don't want to be the people who make Christianity seem like such a joyless venture. And sadly, that means we end up keeping the Good News to ourselves.

God's community is invitational. I try to ask people who join the church how they found us. And occasionally, someone will mention someone by name as having invited them. Your invitations to other people, inviting them to come and see, are not inconsequential. Who might need your invitation now, in this crazy mixed up world we're in, to come and see a glimpse of grace in community?

The invitation doesn't have an expiration date. We don't invite someone to join us at church and say, "**but this offer is only good for a month and then it expires. ACT NOW. Operators standing by.**" Sometimes the invitation takes years to play out, so people might not even remember having been invited. The invitation might be something they heard, read, or saw at some point in the past, something you had done or said in the community, that stayed there in the back of their minds until the call to "come and see" Calvary was remembered. Or maybe the invitation happened in another town, or when you were a kid, and you didn't remember the invitation until you were sitting on the 22 Fillmore, looked out the window, and saw the church as the bus went by.

Who invited you to "come and see"? Can you even remember? What made you want to be a part of a community that followed a Palestinian Jew who died 2,000 years ago and claimed to be the Son of God?

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I noticed that in each of the responses to the invitation in this story in John's gospel, people noticed a different thing about Jesus. For John the Baptizer, Jesus was the **Lamb of God**. For Andrew, Jesus was the **Messiah**. Phillip followed a direct invitation from Jesus and then invited Nathanael because "we have found him about whom Moses in the law and the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth." Nathanael followed Jesus because of what Jesus knew about Nathanael—that might be my favorite reason of all of them—the notion that God knows exactly who I am, and wants me to follow anyway.

Each of us would describe who Jesus is in different terms. This doesn't mean we're wrong for having different answers. It's worth noting that what brings us to faith may be different than what drew someone else.

Which means we won't offer a class on exactly what to say to invite someone to "come and see" Jesus. What I like about these call stories in John's gospel is that each of the disciples are drawn by different things and are accepted as they are. Nathanael is called, even as he makes fun of Jesus' hometown. *They even take snarky disciples to follow Jesus*, which surely gives me hope.

Jesus took one look at Simon and said "You are Simon, son of John. You are to be called Cephas (which is translated "Rocky"). He recognizes everything in Peter in a glance—his passion, his impetuous spirit, his deep heart—and he never tries to pretend Peter is anything other than that. The invitation to come and see is for our authentic selves.

Which means our invitation to others needs to come from our own authentic self too. Speaking of faith is never the time to pretend to be someone you're not. And it may not involve a lot of words.

I have a friend who isn't a churchy person, but she loves our city, and has been dismayed about the trash on the streets. So two years ago, she decided to start picking up trash. She walks through town with a trash picker upper and cleans the streets. She figured one way to bring back the city she loves is to clean it. She doesn't pound on doors and shame people for their messy sidewalks. She just picks up the trash.

I went with her on two trash walks this weekend. I knew she did this, but I hadn't gone with her before. But Friday, when she invited me, I said yes. It wasn't a harsh invitation. No mention of "if you want to be my friend, you'll do this". I was walking home from her house and I asked her if she wanted to walk with me. She asked if I wanted to pickup trash. And that's how easy the invitation was.

As we were walking, I wondered about the ripple effects of her work. Yes, she has picked up a lot of garbage in the past two years. So that's worth noting. But how many people have seen her walking down the street with her trash bag and grabber and been invited into seeing their own role in our city differently? I suspect she has changed things in ways she'll never know.

If I hadn't enjoyed it, and decided it wasn't the thing for me, she would have been fine with that and understood if I didn't do it again. Come and see doesn't mean you have to stay forever. Jesus' invitation is not like the Hotel California—where you can check out anytime you like, but you can never leave.

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A little later in John's gospel, Jesus offers a teaching about what we now understand to be communion. *"Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them."*

On hearing that, some of his disciples say "what are you talking about? That's nuts. We're outta here." And Jesus says "cool. See ya. Bye." (That's a rough translation of the Greek)

The invitation may not be for everyone, and that's okay. Not everyone wants to come and see. Some people may have been so hurt and injured by previous churches that they may never darken the door of a church again.

Our job description as disciples is the inviting. God's job description is the saving of the world. We will do our part and trust God will do theirs.

The invitation to come and see is less about building an argument for faith and convincing people that we have the right, and only, answer to the question. Our very lives are how we invite people to come and see—how are we living out our faith so people will want to join in community?

In John's Gospel, Jesus' baptism happens offstage. We don't actually see it. This will be a theme in John's gospel—we are not eyewitnesses to the life of Jesus. We only know of Jesus through what other people tell us about

him. When we decorated the sanctuary for today, we had the fabric come down from the heavens, but instead of going only to the font, we draped it through the Communion Table and the cross on the way to the baptismal font.

These are all places that point us to Jesus, that help us come and see who he was.

As we see the stories of Jesus and the disciples play out, it will show us what we already know from our own experience—community is messy and challenging and wonderful. Life giving and aggravating. And that's our invitation.

The invitation to come and see is a response to both our baptisms and to the baptism of Jesus, to join on this journey of discipleship in community. Even if we could do it on our own, we aren't called to do it on our own. We go together. Our successes and our failures are a part of who we are together.

I'd like to leave you with a quote from a Roman Catholic Archbishop from Brazil, Dom Helder Camara. He said, "When we are dreaming alone, it is only a dream. When we are dreaming with others, it is the beginning of reality."

Friends, what reality are we being called to dream together? How will our lives respond to the invitation? Come and see!