

# Come and See!

Genesis 28:10-22, John 1:35-51 (ESV)

December 3, 2006

At the beginning of today's reading, Jesus had no disciples. By the end of the reading, he had five disciples! In those few hours, we have the beginning of the Christian faith, the beginning of Christian discipleship, and the beginning of the Christian church. Whatever church we have today, whatever discipleship there is, and whatever faith we have today, to the extent that they are true and Christian, trace back to these beginnings.

John the Baptist pointed two of his own disciples away from himself and toward Jesus Christ, saying, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" These words reference what he had said the day before, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!...I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God." John understood that beyond loneliness, heartache, hunger, poverty, war, disease, distress, depression, injustice, violence, terrorism, and even death, the greatest human problem is sin. We who were created to be in relationship with God have removed ourselves from that relationship. Now we find ourselves spiraling downward in the quicksand of self-centeredness. John knew the problem, and he saw the solution. God has determined to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. He sent his only Son, Jesus Christ, to take away the sin of the world.

John's entire purpose in life was to point people to Jesus. "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" Were they interested? "The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus." They heard the gospel, and they became disciples. They heard the promise of the forgiveness of sin, and they went running to the source. They heard the words of grace, and they opened their hearts for it to pour in. The mystery of the universe was revealed, and they received it gladly. Is it of interest to us, too? Do we realize that the empty, aching void in our lives is where God is supposed to be? Do we dare to follow God's Christ?

"Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, 'What are you seeking?' And they said to him, 'Rabbi...where are you staying?' He said to them, 'Come and you will see.'" This has to do with more than the evening's lodging. The word translated here as "to stay" also means "to remain" or "to abide," and it is one of the key words in this gospel. Toward the end of the gospel, Jesus used it to exhort his disciples:

“Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.... Whoever who abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit.... If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers.... If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it shall be done for you.... Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love” (John 15:4-10 (ESV)).

So, the question here is not simply where Jesus was staying that night, though they did go and see where he was staying and stay with him. Their question to Jesus is more, “Have you come into humanity to stay with us? Are you in this for the long haul? Will you abide with us for eternity, reclaim us as your own, and take us home with you to abide with our only Father in heaven? That is what we are looking for!” And that is why Jesus said to them, “Come and you will see.”

The question for us today is, “What are we looking for?” Are we looking for a little magic, to make our problems go away? Are we looking for a little comfort for our pain, so we can go on living any way we want to? Are we looking for every opportunity to advance ourselves, even at the cost of others? Are we looking for a life of endless blessing, without the demands of discipleship? It is unlikely that we will find any of these. But if we are looking for the love of God, for the forgiveness of sin, for the call to die to self and so to live to God, for life and victory over sin and death, for order in the midst of chaos, for meaning in the midst of confusion, and for peace and joy, then we have come to the right place. We are following the right path. And Jesus says to us all, “Come and you will see.”

Andrew, one of these first disciples of Jesus, found his brother, Simon Peter, told him they had found the Christ, and brought him to Jesus. What a wonderful example of what it means to be a disciple, finding and bringing other people to Jesus! There is nothing more important that Andrew could have done. By his seeking, testifying, and bringing, Andrew introduced Simon to Jesus. Jesus took one look at Simon and named him the Rock, a promise of future service which only Jesus could see.

The next day, Jesus found Philip, and then Philip brought Nathanael to Jesus. This finding and bringing constitutes one of the basic dynamics of what it means to be Christian. If you are seeking the forgiveness of sin, you can find it in Christ. If Christ has found you, you live that out by bringing others to Christ. Jesus called Philip as he had the others, saying, “Follow me.” When Philip found Nathanael and told him about Jesus, Nathanael had his doubts and questions. Then Philip echoed

the words of Jesus from the day before, saying, “Come and see.” Here is the plain, simple, straightforward work of evangelism, in its purest form: “Come and see.” “Come and see.” “Come and see.” Someone said that to us. Someone said it to him or her before that, and so on, all the way back to Philip and Nathanael, to Andrew and Peter, and to Jesus himself.

If this were not true, we would not be here today, worshiping the God and Father of our Lord, Jesus Christ. There is an unbroken chain of witness all the way back. And now it is our turn! To whom have we said, “Come and see”? To whom have we borne witness? Whom have we found and brought to Jesus, as someone found and brought us?

So far as it is up to us, will the church extend to another generation? Will we share the faith with those who have not yet heard the good news? We know that at some level it is not up to us. The church will survive and thrive not because of what we do or fail to do but because God will provide for the church. And yet, to whatever extent that it is up to us, how well are we fulfilling our responsibilities? To whom are we giving the opportunity that Philip gave to Nathanael, to meet the Christ? It turned out that Jesus knew more about Nathanael than was humanly possible, and Nathanael replied, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” To which Jesus said, in effect, “Do you believe because of this little stuff? You haven’t seen anything yet!”

Today’s reading ends as Jesus says to Nathanael, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.” It is an echo of Jacob’s ladder but with a difference. For Jacob, it was a dream, a vision. In Jesus, it has come true. Jacob thought the ladder he saw was the gate of heaven. But instead, Jesus teaches that he himself is the gate of heaven, the open door to God the Father, the only way home. Jacob thought the place he slept was important, and he named it Bethel, the House of God. We know that the person Jesus is far more important. And his name is not only Rabbi, or Teacher, but also the Lamb of God, Messiah, Christ, the Son of God, and he King of Israel. The word “you” which Jesus used in this verse is plural. It points beyond any one person to all the faithful. The promise Jesus made of seeing the gate of heaven is not only for Nathanael, but also for us.

How does this ancient gospel apply to our lives yet today? First, Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, which is also to say that he takes away your sin and mine. Sometimes that is hard to believe. But it is true. Sin is the great barrier that stands between us and God. Thanks be to God that Jesus has already paid the price for us! He has destroyed and removed the barrier. He is the gateway to heaven. I urge you to receive, and to rejoice in, the forgiveness of sin.

Second, we are called to “Come and see” who Jesus is. We are called to follow him as the Christ. The call is to each of us. It is not enough for us that Andrew, Peter, Philip, and Nathanael followed Christ. It is not enough for us that our parents in the faith followed Christ. It is time for us to follow Christ, you and me. Having heard the good news, we are to believe. We are to obey, to rejoice, and to follow. Having received the invitation, we are to respond. Having been pointed in the right direction, we are to make the journey. If you have never made the commitment to follow him, now is the day. If you have followed him faithfully all your life, now follow him more closely, worship him more joyfully, serve him more fully, and obey him more gladly than ever before.

Third, we are called to call others. In today’s reading, John the Baptist pointed away from himself and toward Jesus. He is a good model for the church. We are to point away from ourselves and toward Christ. Moreover, in today’s reading the first disciples become missionaries and evangelists immediately, not years later. Mission is part of who disciples are. Evangelism is part of what disciples are about. John Calvin writes of this passage:

That Andrew immediately brings his brother expresses the nature of faith, which does not keep the light hidden within or quench it, but rather spreads it in every direction. Andrew has scarcely one spark; and yet by it he enlightens his brother. Woe to our apathy, if we...do not try to make others partakers of the same grace!<sup>1</sup>

We cannot keep the Christian faith to ourselves. We cannot contain the gospel. To be a disciple of Jesus Christ is to seek, to find, and to bring other people to Jesus Christ. To fail to bear witness or to refuse to invite others would be to disavow the lordship of Christ over our lives. Jesus told his first disciples, “Come and see.” They told his next disciples, “Come and see.” Someone told each of us, “Come and see.” And now, it is our turn.

We who have received forgiveness are to share the source of forgiveness. We who have been called are to call. We who have received grace and mercy are to share grace and mercy. We who have been sought and found and brought are to seek and to find and to bring. Now it is our turn, as we leave this sanctuary, as we

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<sup>1</sup>John Calvin, *Calvin’s New Testament Commentaries*, eds. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance, vol. 4: *The Gospel According to St. John 1-10*, trans. T. H. L. Parker (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, reprinted 1988), 4:37.

return to our homes, our neighborhoods, our schools, and our work places, to say to our relatives, friends, neighbors, schoolmates, coworkers, and even strangers, in the name and for the sake of Jesus Christ, “Come and see.” Come to church. Hear the gospel. See what we are talking about. Meet the Lamb of God, who bears away the sin of the world. Come to know the Son of God. Christ has called us to follow him and to be his evangelists. How will we answer his call today?

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*To God be the glory forever and ever! Amen.*

© Dr. James C. Goodloe IV, Pastor  
Grace Covenant Presbyterian Church  
1627 Monument Avenue  
Richmond, Virginia 23220  
[www.grace-covenant.org](http://www.grace-covenant.org)