

Come and See
John 1:43-51

Have you ever experienced something so grand that you couldn't wait to share it, but, your words could not begin to explain what was happening in your soul? I'll admit, there have been rare moments when something happened to me that I wasn't able to explain. One moment in particular, was during the Lenten season of 1994. I was at a seminary friends congregation for their evening Lenten service. The congregation was randomly choosing songs and someone chose hymn number 593, Here I Am Lord. My friend had been trying to convince me that I needed to be on the Elder track instead of the Christian Education track. I kept saying, "That's not for me. I'm a teacher at heart."

As the notes of the hymn's chorus were played, I began to feel hands gently pressing down on my shoulders, but no one was there. With each chorus, my friend would look directly into my eyes and I could feel God's presence saying, "come and see" as the weight of the hands grew more intense. Finally, during the final chorus, silently to God, I said, "Ok, but if this doesn't work I'm going back to teaching." These words do not even come close to sharing what that experience was like for me. Therefore, I extend the invitation to you that Philip said to Nathanael, "Come and see."

The Holy Spirit is inviting you to come, see, and experience the power of God at work. Let's take a closer look at what Nathanael saw.

John begins his good news of God with the gathering of Jesus' disciples. What I find interesting about John is that each of the Disciples follow because of a personal invitation from a friend, family member, or directly from Jesus. Andrew was a Disciple of John, who witnessed Jesus' baptism and was encouraged by John to follow Jesus. Andrew recognized Jesus as the fulfillment of the scriptures prophecy and invited his brother Simon Peter to come and see. Philip came from the same town as Andrew and Simon Peter; who probably heard from Andrew and Simon Peter about Jesus. Philip goes to his friend Nathanael with the news, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and the Prophets: Jesus, Joseph's son, from Nazareth." The invitation to "Come and see" comes through the excitement of a life that has been touched by God's Holy Spirit. This experience had been so wonderful that these men felt the need to be shared with more than words. But, when Philip invited Nathanael, according to John, Nathanael was skeptical.

Nathanael had good reason for his skepticism. He knew the city of Nazareth had not produced anything of much worth; according to Nathan's

personal experience. He wasn't doubting that this man Philip spoke about was the prophecy coming true. He just couldn't understand how it could come from Nazareth. He responds to Philip by saying, "Can anything from Nazareth be good?" Rather than being judgmental, Philip simply extended the invitation to "Come and see" for yourself. This personal invitation gave Nathanael the encouragement he needed to see this man Jesus. It was an invitation that changed Nathanael's world. God has been teaching me in this story is that my task as clergy (and as a Christian) is to extend invitations to come and see God at work. God will do the rest. Like Nathanael, sometimes I can be skeptical; but then, am I looking and inviting in the right places?

Nathanael, maybe through curiosity, chose to follow Philip to meet this man, Jesus. At this first encounter, Jesus spoke first saying, "Here is a genuine Israelite in whom there is no deceit." Jesus and Nathanael had never met, but Jesus knew the nature of Nathanael's soul. Jesus knew he was a righteous child of God who had been obedient and faithful, but Jesus saw more. Nathanael was surprised that Jesus could know him so well, after all, Jesus was from Nazareth a place where Nathanael did not travel. However, it was Jesus' answer to Nathanael's question, "how do you know

me," that changed Nathanael's heart. I think it's important to pause for a moment to understand what a heart change is all about. Spiritual change, as John Wesley describes it, is "a heart strangely warmed." It is difficult to explain, but you will know it when you experience it. For me, the change was a validation and a peace of knowing my calling was greater than anything I could have planned for myself. You see, I didn't have to give up my teacher heart; God is just using it in a different fashion. Your change of heart takes you to the place where you are most fulfilled in life. However, to find this change of heart one first has to do some type of exploration?

Now back to Nathanael and the "Come and see" invitation. Nathanael's conversation with Jesus revealed that good really could come out of Nazareth. This enlightenment allowed Jesus to extend a second invitation to Nathanael. Jesus invited him to come on a journey where he could, "see heaven open and God's angels going up to heaven and down to earth on the Human One" meaning God's Son. What an invitation. What would it be like to see God's heaven open and angels coming? Is this an invitation only for the righteous and obedient? I believe this is the invitation that was given to us last Sunday, through our baptism of the

Holy Spirit. However, for whatever reason, some of us are hesitant to come and see what the Holy Spirit looks like and can offer us. Which is why I offer you another invitation.

Jesus gave Nathanael an opportunity to think about his past and what kept him as a righteous and obedient servant of God. This rearview mirror experience also allows the chance to see where God has been at work in my life and others that I have encountered. I invite you to think about some of your fondest memories of church experiences. What was happening that made you feel part of God's family? Where were the lightbulb moments in others, that brought them closer to God? I believe that when we pause to see where God has been, it is easier to take the next step and see where God is calling us to follow Jesus. Each of the Disciples came, saw, and followed into uncharted territory, but they went with faith, trust, and confidence in God. I invite you to "come and see" the places God is already working and experience first and what it is like to be a part of something so great that it is indescribable. Who could you invite to see the amazing work of God? Amen.