

John 1:43-51  
1/14/18—2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after the Epiphany B

Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18  
I Samuel 3:1-10

## Come and See

If you're ever in Mount Pleasant, South Carolina, and have a little extra time, you may want to stop by Hibben United Methodist Church. Hanging in the halls of that church is an amazing collection of an artist's conceptions of each of the twelve disciples and of their Lord. A few years ago, I attended a series of meetings at Hibben. Before and after each meeting, I would wander from one portrait to the next, examining each. Wondering what it was that made the painter choose each detail of appearance, the expression on each face. These portraits are fascinating.

Do you ever wish you could go back to that time and actually see the One those early disciples saw? Surely their eyes were blessed. Do you wish you could see them, too—really *see* them? These ragtag, uneducated, first-century people Jesus chooses to be his first and closest followers? Do you think they would look the way you expect them to look? Or would they appear somehow different? What do you suppose Jesus sees in

each of them that causes him to decide to call that particular one?

This Sunday the church reads a text from John's Gospel. In John's first chapter, Jesus has begun calling those who will become his disciples. One thing we notice is that none of them *signs up* to be a follower of Jesus.

You and I don't sign up, either. Even if we think it's all our own idea. The One who has placed that desire in our hearts always makes the first move. Always takes the initiative of grace.

That's how it happens with Philip. Philip doesn't find Jesus. Jesus finds Philip. Using those familiar words, *follow me*, Jesus calls Philip to be his disciple. And Philip says *yes* to Jesus' call.

We know Philip says yes! We know this because, when you become a disciple of Jesus, you follow Jesus. You do what Jesus does. And what's the very first thing Philip does after Jesus calls him? Philip follows Jesus by doing what Jesus does. Philip calls someone into discipleship.

According to John's Gospel, that someone else is Nathanael. When Philip approaches his friend Nathanael, he

tells Nathanael something about who this Jesus is: the One foretold by prophets and in the law. That's of great significance to Nathanael, who's been seen "under the fig tree," which, in the tradition of his people, means that he's a student of Torah, a scholar of the Law of Moses.

Philip tells Nathanael something else, too. Something that lets him—and lets us—know that Jesus is human. Jesus has an earthly family and comes from an earthly place. Nazareth.

And what does Nathanael have to say about that? About Nazareth? *That one-horse town on the way to nowhere? That little backwater hamlet? That blink-twice-and-you-miss-it Nazareth? You've gotta be kidding! I doubt that anyone or anything good could come out of Nazareth.*

Come and see, Philip tells him. *Come and see.*

Who has called *you* to come and see the One from Nazareth? Who's encouraged you? Who's nurtured you in the faith? Was it a parent or grandparent? A childhood pastor or Sunday school teacher? A co-worker? A friend? Maybe it was more than one person. Maybe it was a whole congregation. We remember these people who invited us to come and see. We

celebrate them. We stand on their shoulders. They've lifted us up. They've helped us see.

I give thanks for every one of this great cloud of witnesses who have invited each of you to come and see.

More than once in your life, probably, you've been invited to come and see. Maybe many times. But each time you come and see, each time you encounter the Christ, he reveals more of his gracious self to you. Here in John's first chapter—which I invite you to read in its entirety when you have opportunity—you're told quite a bit about who Jesus is. The Fourth Evangelist offers a lengthy list of titles for Jesus, offers different ways that people see Jesus.

Jesus is known as the son of Joseph from Nazareth. Jesus is "Rabbi" which, translated, means *Teacher*. Jesus is the One about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote. Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Jesus is the King of Israel. Jesus is the Messiah, which is translated *Anointed*. Jesus is the Son of Man. Jesus is the Son of God.

It's an extensive list. But it's by no means an exhaustive list. Just when you think you have Jesus all neatly figured out, you suddenly find out that you don't. There are always more

questions than answers. There's always more to glean, always more to learn, always more to discover. There's always more of the never-ending fullness of his identity and his grace. Always more of the revelation of who he is, this One you follow.

Following Jesus, being his disciple, begins with coming and seeing. Christ's servant Martin asked people to come and see. Martin was born eighty-nine years ago tomorrow. And we honor his memory with a special offering on this day the United Methodist Church designates as Human Relations Sunday. With his life, Martin Luther King, Jr. invited people to come and see the One who desires justice for all God's children, the One who desires that all peoples live together in harmony and peace.

Who will *you* invite to come and see this week? This month? Who will *you* invite to come and see as this new year unfolds? As you reflect on being called to share and witness to your Christian faith with others, there are a couple of things I hope you'll notice about Philip's invitation to Nathanael to come and see.

The first is that sometimes Jesus himself calls people to be his disciples. And sometimes he uses others to call people into discipleship for him. What a great privilege, what a humbling

experience, what an incredible blessing it is that Jesus can use and does use and will continue to use ordinary people like you and me in his ministry and mission!

The other thing I hope you'll notice about Philip's invitation to Nathanael is that when Nathanael is hesitant, Philip doesn't try to reason with him or argue with him. Instead, Philip says to Nathanael—in so many words—*don't just take my word for it. Come and see. Come and see for yourself.*

Doesn't Nathanael, in a way, remind you of Thomas? You remember Thomas, who lets his fellow disciples know: *I can't believe based only on what you say about Jesus. I've got to see for myself. I've got to encounter Jesus myself. I've got to experience Jesus personally. For myself.*

Thomas and Nathaniel could come and see in a way that we twenty-first century believers can't. Yet there are many ways in which our eyes are opened. Through the experience of worshiping with the community of faith. Through searching God's word in sacred Scripture for glimpses of the One you seek. Through the intimacy of waiting in stillness, of praying, even as young Samuel prayed: *Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.* Through being made a part of Christ and having him

become a part of you in the sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion.

John Wesley calls these channels of grace. They are the means through which you and I and others we invite grow in faith and in the knowledge and love of God in Christ Jesus, whose self-revelation comes to us in myriad ways. So many ways to come and see.

Just as Nathanael comes and sees. But before he does, he expresses some doubt. Expresses it openly. Do you think that the writer of Nathanael's story could have been suggesting that the pathway to faith runs through doubt? In any case, we're grateful for Nathanael's honesty, for his genuineness. Jesus himself finds nothing false in Nathanael.

Beloved, there's not much else we know about Nathanael. He's mentioned by name only in this Gospel according to John. We meet him here at the beginning of the Gospel. And then we don't see him again until its conclusion. After Nathanael has witnessed the crucifixion of Jesus, after the resurrection, he encounters Jesus—alive again!—one morning on the Sea of Galilee.

That wondrous morning, I feel sure that Nathanael remembers what Jesus has said about the great things Nathanael would come to see and understand—about heaven being opened, about God’s messengers ascending and descending on the Son of Man. Who is the ladder, the bridge, the connection between God and human creatures. Nathanael would come to see and to understand the truth, the reality that Jesus Christ is the One in whom God and humanity meet and are joined and dwell together, always and forever.

And as it was with Nathanael, so may it be for each of us.

In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Amen.