

Follow Me. Come and See.

John 1:43-51

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43 The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." 44 Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. 45 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." 46 Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see."

47 When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, "Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!" 48 Nathanael asked him, "Where did you get to know me?" Jesus answered, "I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you." 49 Nathanael replied, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" 50 Jesus answered, "Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these." 51 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 Humanity." John 1:43-51

Epiphany is the season of revelation and expansion. As we talked about last week when we focused on the story of the Magi who came from afar following the star, the circle of inspiration goes beyond the people of Israel to embrace the whole earth. The circle of divine encounters embraces all faiths and cultures, and includes friend and foe, kin and stranger. In this season of Epiphany, at a time in which xenophobia is on the rise, we seek to be attentive divine revelation in its many manifestations. God is present in every quest for truth and healing and wholeness.

Today's scripture focusses on listening for the voice of God and God's varied movements within our lives. God is constantly speaking in our lives through insights, encounters, synchronous events, hunches, dreams, bursts of energy, and inspirational thoughts. Our calling is to listen to the many voices of God, often hidden in everyday experience, and then follow God's guidance, shaping our encounters with the Holy One in our unique ways. God called young Samuel in a voice at night. Many of the Psalms reflect God's call and our response, search me and know us.

Our passage today includes Jesus' words of invitation and welcome. Jesus says, 'Follow me.'

How do we follow Jesus in our lives today?

Maybe by being nice to people? Jesus wants us to be nice to people, right? Most of the time.

Telling other people about Jesus? Umm... the pastors are good on that one anyway.

Praying and read our bible? Not as regular at these as we probably should be, but ok.

Going to church? You all get a check for this one today. Good job.

How about volunteering? Sharing our money with worthy organizations? Check.

Maybe if we do enough of these things, or if we have a day where we do several in the same day, then on that day we can really know for sure we are following the ways of Jesus.

Or maybe we have thought that following Jesus means believing certain things about God or life. That seems to be the way people most often define it. The only problem is that the list varies widely depending on who wrote it and when, so it's a little foggy.

Does your list include who to vote for? immigration policy? climate change? Does it include the miracles, and Jesus as the Son of God, and the Bible the primary source of Divine truth? How many things do you have to agree with on whichever list you are using in order to qualify as officially following the ways of Jesus?

OK , so what if following Jesus is more about how you live your life, then?

Is that how we can tell we're doing it right?

But the Dominican nuns in San Rafael are following Jesus one way, and Anne Lamott following in some different ways. And the Hispanic congregations that worship here on Saturdays and Sunday worship and follow in yet another way.

How can we be sure we are doing it right? Or enough? Is it how we live or believe? What else?

The disciples gave up something to follow - their fishing job for their following Jesus job. And maybe also their whole way of life and community and even their connection to their father. As one writer put it, "The father had just gotten business cards printed – "Zebedee and Sons", and off they went, leaving him holding the nets."

But most of us didn't give up our home and go be missionaries in a foreign land, or feed unhoused people from our kitchens at home.

I would be willing to bet on the "How well are you following the ways of Jesus?" scale, very few people, if any, would rank themselves perfectly, including pastors. Most of us would take a "I could be doing better at it" attitude.

So let's go back to this moment, before the disciples were disciples, when they were just fishermen, minding their own business, and Jesus calls them to follow him. And in Mark – I will teach you to fish for people.

In that moment, Jesus isn't just giving them a different job, he's giving them a different identity, a different orientation in the world. Instead of being fishermen – sustaining yourself in the world and contributing to the whole through this certain set of skills – you are going to be fishers of people – oriented toward Christ, that love and grace, and thus toward other people. You will change, by turning away from the sea and toward your sisters and brothers around you.

“Follow me.” Jesus says, “and this is what will happen.” Jesus is not calling them to follow a way of thinking or believing. He is not saying, Acquire more knowledge. Do certain tasks every day. He is not giving them a list to check off to make sure they are honoring God or living a worthy life. He is calling them to follow and live into this larger vision of shalom that is comes from Love Incarnate, mind and body and soul.

Bonhoeffer talked about this as the Who instead of the How. Jesus doesn't give them a How – How should we live? How should we follow? How can we please God? How should we believe, or behave? How do we know if we are doing it right?

Instead, Jesus stands before them and calls them as people, to follow a person. Who is this calling to me? Who am I called to be? Who am I called to be with?

Follow me. I will be with you. I am here. I will lead you. This presence we have most recently described as the Universal Christ. The Cosmic Christ. Connected to the person Jesus.

This changes everything. For them. For us.

The moment is realized; God is right here now. Out there in the world. Right here alongside us in this room this very moment. And this invitation, this loving presence, is always calling us to join a who – not adopt a how.

We come here every week together do that- to be reminded of Christ's constant presence and invitation, and to be with other people, other “whos” and ask together, Who are you, God, and what are you up to? And to practice listening together for God's response. So that when we leave here, we are more connected to the who of God and the whos of others, and we can go back into our lives **not** asking,

How do I follow Jesus today? How do I live a good life? How do I know if I am doing it right?

But, instead, Who will Christ bring across my path today?

Who will I see Jesus in today? Who will see Jesus in me? Who is my neighbor?

Who is the person behind the offensive armor and defensive rhetoric
that I've labeled my enemy?

Who am I called to be in this moment, this situation, this relationship?

And when Jesus invites people to follow and they are transformed by his words and actions and love, who are they becoming? And isn't it interesting that Philip, who is being transformed, says to Nathaniel - “Come and see.”

“Come and see” is a theme throughout John's Gospel. From the early disciples to the Pharisee named Nicodemus, to the Samaritan women at the well, to the man born blind, to Pilate and Thomas, characters in John's Gospel see Jesus.

“Seeing” in John’s gospel, truly seeing, is followed by believing. John’s point is that the faith of the disciples was not naïve gullibility. It was a response to what they saw and experienced. Just before this passage, Jesus speaks these words to Andrew. “Come and see.” Andrew and his brother Simon Peter do see, and they decide to follow Jesus. Jesus then comes to Galilee and bids Philip, “Follow me.” Philip not only follows, but he seeks out Nathaniel to invite him to do the same.

Nathaniel’s first response is skeptical, even insulting. Scholars think maybe his comment, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” reflects a small town rivalry between Nathaniel’s town, Cana, and Nazareth. But Philip invites him, “Come and see,” and Nathaniel’s skepticism is overcome by the actual encounter with Jesus. He goes from skeptical and sarcastic to utterly convinced. He is transformed. Jesus seems to have that effect on people.

Come and see. Many progressive Christians shy away from talking our evangelism or even talking our faith or talking to friends about being part of a church.

But this passage shows we’re not called to cram our faith down anyone’s throat. Instead, simply to offer an invitation to come and see. Come and see what God is still doing, what Christ is doing in the community of disciples who have chosen to follow the ways of Jesus.

Lutheran pastor Nadia Bolz-Weber writes about the team that put together the website for the church she served in Denver. Most churches have a “What we believe” tab on their websites, and they debated what theirs would say. They toyed with having a tab that, when you clicked on it, went straight to the Nicene Creed. They rejected that idea. Finally, one person said, “Why don’t we just have it say, ‘If you want to know what we believe, come and see what we do.’”

“If you want to know what we believe, come and see what we do.”

The Martin Luther King Jr. holiday is tomorrow. As Dr. King reminded us, “...love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into a friend. We never get rid of an enemy by meeting hate with hate; we get rid of an enemy by getting rid of enmity. ... By its very nature, hate destroys and tears down; by its very nature, love creates and builds up. Love transforms with redemptive power.”

What might happen if we were able to say, “Come and see how love is transforming us. Come and see love at work, creating, building up, serving, turning enemies into friends. Come and see how we are deepening our awareness that each person is beloved and held in that love? Come and see how we are working together for justice and peace and caring for the earth. Come and see the joy in our life together, grounded in Christ’s love and light.”

“If you want to know what we believe, come and see what we do.” Amen.

Rev. Kara Root, “Join Me In This,” [in the here and now 1.21.18](#)

Rev. Joanne Whitt, “Come and See,” [Solve by Walking 1.14.24](#)