

Come and See
John 1:35-51

This passage certainly has a lot to tell us about evangelism, doesn't it? We see several different ways in which people come to Jesus, and thus we see different models of mission which we can still use today.

How did Peter come to know about Jesus, for example? Andrew, Peter's brother told him, and many people still come to Christ through the testimony of family members. It turns out that he example of a father is especially powerful. A 1994 survey in Switzerland showed that if a father doesn't go to church at all, his children have only a 1 in 50 chance of regularly attending church themselves. Conversely, if a father is regular in his church attendance, his children have a 1 in 3 chance of regularly attending church, regardless of their mother's example.

Of course Andrew shows us that siblings can play an important role in communicating the gospel. And who can forget the stirring example of Susanna Wesley, who constantly urged her sons John and Charles to live lives of holiness? They would go on to encourage countless others to seek Jesus, founding the Methodist movement. If charity begins at home, how much more should evangelism!

But it isn't just family members that can encourage people to come to Jesus. Philip shows us that friends have a large role to play as well. George Barna's research suggests that one out of every five believers comes to Christ through the influence of friends. Now, he says that only one of every ten comes to Christ because of their preacher, so go tell your friends about Jesus – y'all are twice as important to evangelism as I am!

Of course, preachers do have their part to play in telling the good news, as John the Baptist shows us. At the very beginning of this passage, he tells two of his disciples about Jesus, and they immediately begin following the Lord. Now, while we have no prophets like John today, we do have their writings, which still call people to surrender to Christ as Lord and to accept Him as Savior. All those who proclaim the Biblical truth are thus sharing in John's ministry and passing on His testimony.

So of course we all need to get busy, showing and sharing the truth and the love of Christ however we can. That conviction is what lies behind the session's adoption of the vision statement you see on the back cover of the bulletin: Through fellowship, teaching and service, our congregation should be about the business of sharing the truth of Jesus Christ with one another, with the community, and with the world. In the coming years we will seek to measure all our projects and programs according to this summary of our mission.

But at the same time, we must not fall into the trap of thinking that we can somehow carry out this mission by ourselves. For even as today's passage clearly shows the different ways that people come to Christ, Jesus Himself remains completely in charge of the situation. He is not just the goal of life. He is the One Who enables us to reach that goal.

Sure, Philip shared Christ with his friend Nathanael. But how did Philip come to know Christ in the first place? In verse 43, it wasn't that Philip found Jesus. No, it was Jesus that found Philip. Jesus told Philip, "Follow me," and that's just what Philip did.

In the same way, what happened when those two disciples of John began to follow Jesus? They didn't know what to do, and they really didn't know who He was. At first they were just curious about where he was staying. But Jesus said, "Come and see," inviting them into His life, welcoming them into greater fellowship with Him.

Come and see. The theme of seeing runs throughout the whole passage. This shouldn't, after all, be a surprise, given what we learned in the first part of chapter 1. Jesus, we are told, is the light shining in the darkness, revealing to us the glory of the Father.

And so it's no wonder that John tells his disciples to behold, that is to see, the Lamb of God when he points out Jesus to his followers. It's no wonder that Jesus tells John's disciples to come and see, and that Philip says exactly the same thing to Nathanael. At its root all evangelism is about seeing Jesus, revealing the light of His reality into the darkness of sin and ignorance. Coming to Christ is all about coming to the light.

But again, we should not fall into the trap of imagining that we somehow have the power to open our own eyes, to see the light of Christ by ourselves. For what did John tell us in the first part of this chapter? In Him, in Christ, was life, and the life was the light of men. The light isn't in us – it's in Jesus. What else did John tell us? No man has seen God at any time – it's the only Son of God who reveals God to us. Throughout all the gospels, just as it is Christ who brings sight to the blind, it is Christ Who enables anyone to see Who He really is.

Look, for example, at verse 48. Sure, Nathanael came to Christ because Philip practiced some friendship evangelism, telling him about Jesus. But after he comes to Christ, he finds that Jesus saw him while he was sitting under that fig tree, before Philip ever spoke to him. In a very real sense, the only reason Nathanael saw Christ is that Christ saw Nathanael first.

And throughout this passage, it's what Jesus sees that is so much more important than what we see. In verse 42, when Jesus first meets Andrew's brother Simon, Jesus didn't just look at him. He looked deep within his soul, sizing him up, and predicting that, in spite of his many stumbles

and failures, he would become a rock of faith. Jesus gave him the name “Peter” which means “rock,” not because of what he was, but because of what he would become.

Just so in verse 47, when Jesus saw Nathanael coming, He instantly knew all about him, including his dismissive comments about Jesus’ hometown. Yes, Jesus recognized Nathanael’s tendency not just to call it like he saw it, but to do so in a rather blunt way. Jesus saw through Nathanael and He saw through Peter – but He welcomed them anyway.

So it turns out that what Jesus sees in us is much more important than what we see in Him. And that’s good news, because, in today’s passage, we learn that even those first followers of Christ had only an imperfect view of Him. Unlike us, they saw Jesus with their own eyes, but they really didn’t understand Who He was.

When John’s two disciples and Nathanael first saw Jesus, they called Him “rabbi,” which means “teacher.” People in those days were accustomed to teachers of the Law of Moses gathering disciples around them, and teaching them the truths of what we now know as the Old Testament. And even today, non-Christians are likely to use a similar title for Jesus, as they claim to honor his teachings while dismissing His claims to divinity.

But those who come to Jesus, those whom He invites to draw near to Him and see more of Him, quickly realize that He is much more than just a teacher. After spending a day with Jesus, those two disciples of John realized that what John had said was true. Now, we don’t know exactly what they saw during that day that impressed them so much, but we know Who they saw – the One John had said had such a high rank that he wasn’t worthy to untie His shoes.

They saw enough of Jesus for Andrew to tell his brother Peter that they had found the Messiah, the anointed ruler Whom God had said would come. It also didn’t take long for Philip to come to the same conclusion, to realize that Jesus was the Christ, the One Whom Moses and the prophets said would come to save the people.

Nathanael was no different. He got a glimpse of Jesus’ supernatural knowledge and wisdom and instantly realized that Jesus was the King of Israel the people had been expecting for so long, the One Who would be called the Son of God.

Yes, all of these men saw Jesus as much more than a great teacher, and so we might again be tempted to focus on their experience, to place the emphasis on what they could see. But we’ve already learned that it is much more important for Jesus to see us than for us to see Jesus. Just so, we must remember that what we can see of Jesus is only partial. Our knowledge of Him is, to say the least, necessarily limited.

Think, for example, about what Jesus says at the very end of this passage. He told all the disciples that they would see much more amazing things than they had already seen. After all, Old Testament prophets were able to see into the future. No, Jesus told His disciples that they would see angels ascending and descending on the Son of Man.

What does that mean? It seems that Jesus is pointing to a passage in Genesis 28 about a dream that Jacob had at Bethel as he was leaving his father's house. For what did Jacob see in that dream? A ladder or staircase with its bottom on earth and its top in heaven, and angels going up and down on it. In that dream, God repeated His covenant promises to Jacob, His promise to be with Jacob and to protect him and to give him the promised land. More importantly, God said that in Jacob's seed, in his offspring, all the families of the earth would be blessed.

In today's passage, Jesus applied that dream to Himself. Jesus said that He, the Son of Man, was somehow the fulfillment of that dream. Jesus was thus saying that He was the link that would bridge the gap between earth and Heaven. Jesus was saying that He was the seed of Jacob that would bring blessings to the whole world.

That was a whole lot more than any of Jesus' disciples, or anyone else at the time, was expecting. Yes, those who came close to Jesus could grasp that He was a great teacher. Some even realized that He was the Messiah whom the people of God had been expecting for about 1000 years. But their expectations of what the Messiah would be and do continued to blind them, in a sense, to Jesus' true mission. They never would understand what He was all about, not until after He had risen from the dead.

For the sad truth is that, no matter how rocklike Peter's faith would later become, he would deny Jesus three times on the night he was arrested. The sad truth is that, even though Nathanael and the rest of the disciples confessed that Jesus was the King of Israel, they would also abandon Him on that night, when He didn't turn out to be the sort of liberating warrior they expected.

No, it wasn't until after Jesus rose from the dead that they all realized what John the Baptist had been saying at the very beginning of Jesus' ministry, at the very beginning of this passage. "Look," John said, "there's the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world." John knew that Jesus would be more than just a great teacher. John knew that Jesus would be more than just a conquering king.

John knew that Jesus would be the Lamb of God. That means that Jesus would build that staircase between earth and Heaven by becoming a sacrifice for us. Jesus would bridge the gap our sins created between God and Man only by taking those sins upon Himself, dying in our place.

That's the Jesus we need to proclaim. That's the Jesus Whom we need to follow. That's the Jesus we need to worship and serve. That's the Jesus we need to see.

Hymn 85 Crown Him with Many Crowns