

“Come and See”

John 1: 43-51

Do you love Jesus?

If we were having a conversation and I asked you that question, how would it make you feel? How would you answer? After you had said the obligatory “YES” what would you offer when I said, “Why?” and “How?”

For some reason such questions are relegated to the Baptists or to evangelicals or to the Church of God types. And I have often wondered why we are so anxious about such questions or such conversations.

I guess it could be we have been so conditioned that there are certain “code words” that we think ought to be used. OR we have not equipped ourselves with the right vocabulary or language OR we just do not know how to answer such questions. It becomes confusing and rather awkward for many of us. We have the notion that there is a particular way to respond to such questions and we are not clear we have the right formula of words. It does not seem easy for many of us Presbyterians.

So, today, let’s see what scripture can teach us about being a disciple. About answering the question, “Do you love Jesus?”

Remember we are at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry...we celebrated his baptism last week as the start of his ministry. This week we shift from Mark’s Gospel to John’s Gospel. For some reason, the lectionary shifts every so often out of Mark. It appears in John 1 that Jesus is calling his first disciples and in this story I find helpful insights in how we can answer the question, ‘do you love Jesus?’ Or “Are you a disciple of Christ?”

Notice the language...verse 43, “Jesus found Philip.” Similar language to what we observed last week in baptism. God comes after us. God comes looking for us. God seeks us out. God desires us to be in relationship with him.

So many of us have a very low self-image and concept of our spirituality. We are not worthy. We are not good enough. We are not deserving. We lack a great deal in our spirituality. We really gang up on ourselves as being less than worthy of a relationship with Jesus. We just do not measure up!

And we are right! We are not....and yet God desires us, wants us, and continually takes the initiative to relate to us. God does not give up on us as easily as we give up on God or give up on ourselves. He wants us because we are his creation and God is eager to be in relationship with us.

As a young pastor in Southwest Georgia, I was always mystified on Communion Sundays. Attendance was always lower those Sundays. After a couple of years observing that pattern, I asked some church members why there was a lower attendance on Communion Sundays. And without hesitation, I got the answer: we do not deserve it. We are not worthy. We fall short of the Glory of God and just stay home.

I was floored. Because those reasons - - which are valid ones - - are the very reasons you need to be there! That should be our motivation to take the sacrament. To be in communion with Christ...to let him feed us....to be nurtured by him...to be strengthened for the journey.

For in the sacrament, we realize what God did: he came to earth and gave himself as the gift of gifts to us...through his body and blood sacrificed on the cross.

Discipleship or loving Jesus is realizing that God comes to us. God takes the initiative. God gifts us with his love.

Quickly, Philip found Nathanael and told him the good news: we have found the one Moses and the prophets wrote of: Jesus, son of Joseph, from Nazareth.

The way we love Jesus is to tell someone else. Our relationship with Jesus models our relationship with others. It models what it means to love Jesus: have a relationship with someone else and share Jesus and life with them.

Here is where we often stumble. We stumble because we have this stereotypical concept of being a witness for Christ. And we despise it! A stereotypical concept of being a witness for Christ is being buttonholed by an absolute stranger who puts the question to us: Do you believe Jesus Christ is your Lord and Savior? Kind of like being pushed into a corner and you better say “YES” so you can just get away!

Or the other one that is even more scary is being confronted by someone who says, “If you died tonight, do you know where your soul will end up?” It is rather unnerving of us and scares many of us.

Yet, notice the approach of Philip to Nathanael. He did not quiz him but simply made a statement, “We have found him of whom we were looking!” It is not said to a stranger. It is not just someone walking on the street. It is not meeting a quota of “x” number of people I lead to the Lord.

No, it was about a relationship. So, it helps me to realize I am a witness to Christ with the people with whom I have a relationship. Not with strangers. Not buttonholing people. But sharing the Good News with people whom I know or work with or have some kind of relationship.

Here is where I think we are not equipped language-wise. Here is a great opportunity to be a witness and we often do not take it.

Unfortunately, we relegate our God language to Sundays or church gatherings. Instead of naturally sharing with others how God is working in our lives. Or sharing how my life is in relationship with God. Or sharing the experience I had recently of God moving in my life.

You see, I often think we do not see God in our lives except for major events. When God is really functioning on a daily basis in our lives

One of the gifts I receive regularly from African American friends is that their language is full of “God-talk!” It is a common expression in their daily conversations. It is kind of like breathing. God or God language is peppered throughout their conversations. God is very real and alive in all they say.

So, to witness is not to stand on a street corner. No, it is to share what God has done in our lives and what God is doing in our lives. It is part of our biography on a daily basis.
Jesus comes to us.
We go to others.

Third, notice the bump in the road by Nathanael, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" People are not always receptive. People are skeptics. People are resistant. Everyone will not welcome our comments with open arms. I could make the argument that Nathanael was the first true Presbyterian! We focus on God so much with our minds, that we are not easily taken when someone begins to talk about God and God's actions. That may or may not be good...it just is.

So, this skepticism will happen and everyone will not be convinced about your spirituality and your God experience. The beauty of Philip is that he did not get defensive or argumentative. He was not trying to out argue Nathanael. Instead in verse 46, he just said, "Come and see!"
Is that not a real witness? Look and see for yourself? Look and see if you can see what I see. Enable others to catch a glimpse of what we have.

Because ultimately it is the Holy Spirit that convicts. We share with others but cannot convert someone. We tell about Jesus but Jesus comes to them as he has come to us. We are God's hands and feet and share the great news we have been given.

I have a feeling that many of us are closer to the meaning of this story about witnessing than the person standing on the street corner. For we have "come and seen" what marvelous things God has done in our lives. Is not that the phenomenon of our faith to 'come and see.'

Come and see...

-how God healed a broken relationship in a family between parents and a child.

-how God, the Divine Physician, healed someone's body that was not supposed to be healed.

-how God gave a person hope when they felt helpless and hopeless.

-how God enabled a congregation to make a difference in the lives of poor people in their community.

-how God brought about justice in unfair practices in the judicial system and a person on death row was exonerated and freed.

-how God touched a teenager life and turned it around just in the nick of time.

-how God worked with a person struggling about what to do with their life and they finally submitted to God's will.

-how God equipped us with the right words to say to a family member that made all the difference in the world.

-how God challenged someone to tithe their income for God's Kingdom and their life finally began to fall in place.

-how God stood with us in making a decision about our marriage and provided a solid outcome for all parties.

-how God enabled people in a church to speak the truth in love to a member who was causing difficulty in the congregation.

-how God has such a sense of humor when we got all wound up about an incident that turned out to be nothing.

We have NUMEROUS ways to invite people to "Come and See." And we are even invited to "come and see" ourselves to behold God's hand at work in powerful ways. It is not luck. It is not happenstance. It is not coincidence...it is GOD AT WORK!

We have numerous relationships where God is calling us to reach out. It is a slower process than having 25 people commit to Christ in a revival. Yet it is deeper and longer lasting and it is the way God tells us to do! For in our relationship with Christ, we become committed disciples.

In relationship with other people, we are able to empower them to see Christ in their lives. For that is our faith: a relationship with Jesus Christ and with one another.

Could it be you are the Christ going to other people. You are the one through whom Christ "found" them as he found Philip? Searched for them? Desired them?

That is what it means to "love Jesus!" Come and See!