

# “Come and See”

*Valley Presbyterian Church – January 2, 2022*

2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Christmas

Isaiah 60:1-6

Rev. John Wahl

John 1:35-51

“It was about four o’clock in the afternoon.” Writers are taught about the importance of providing concrete details. For instance, in the gospels, when wee little Zacchaeus wants to see Jesus, he climbs up not just any tree, it’s a sycamore tree. On Good Friday, the sun suddenly goes dark at noon. And on Easter morning, the women go to the tomb at dawn.

Here, in the gospel of John, the writer tells us that Jesus encounters his first two followers when it was about four o’clock in the afternoon. Why would that concrete detail be significant? Those reading this gospel have already discovered, in this first chapter, that light and darkness are significant: light signifies life, revelation, and clarity. So, what could the author be trying to say that it is almost four o’clock in the afternoon? Depending on the time of the year, it could be the hottest part of the day, or the sun might be starting to set. What are we to make of this?

Backing up a little in the story, we hear Jesus speak for the first time; asking these two men, “What are you looking for?” On one level, this question asks why they are walking after him. But on a second level, Jesus is inquiring about what they are seeking? What are they hoping to find as they follow Jesus?

Their response – “Rabbi, where are you staying?” – also works on two levels. They may want to know where Jesus is staying because it is getting late in the day and they also may need a place to stay; they are looking for a lodging recommendation. But the Greek word translated as “stay” signifies, in John’s gospel, abiding or remaining permanently. Their question is really asking: where does Jesus permanently abide; reflecting that the desire of any disciple, any follower is to be in Jesus’ presence always.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Gilberto Ruiz from *WorkingPreacher.com*

After we are given the concrete detail, Jesus invites these two men to “come and see,” an invitation that one level means to go with him and look at where he is staying, but at a deeper level is an offer to approach Jesus with openness and look upon him through the eyes of faith and belief.

Theologian Raymond Brown makes a compelling argument that, for this specific time of day – about four o’clock in the afternoon – to make sense, this encounter between Jesus and his first disciples must have happened on a Friday, on the eve of the Sabbath.<sup>2</sup> Based on this theory, Jesus would have wanted to know what the two men were seeking – was it connection with God? And the followers, on their part, would have wanted to know where Jesus was staying because if they could stay with him, they would have the opportunity to spend the full twenty-four hours of Sabbath with Jesus: at rest and in communion with the one who was just introduced to them as “the Lamb of God.” What better chance to spend time with God and in community with each other? How better to find what they were seeking?

“Come and see.” These words, this invitation, form the heart not simply of this opening scene in Jesus’ ministry, but with much of John’s gospel portrait of Jesus. Again and again, from these early disciples, to the Pharisee named Nicodemus, to the Samaritan woman at the well, to the man born blind, to Peter and Pilate and eventually Thomas, characters throughout John’s gospel are encountered by Jesus. These woman and men, Jews and Gentiles, powerful and vulnerable, people of all varieties Jesus meets; and to each one, in one way or another, he says the same thing: come and see God doing a new thing; come and see as a new future opens up in front of you; come and see the grace of God made accessible for all.

And in response, some take up the invitation and follow, while others are confused or simply refuse to believe Jesus’ offer. Some not only follow but invite others to do the same.<sup>3</sup>

That is, of course, what happens here. One of these first two followers, whose name is Andrew, goes to find and share what he has seen with Simon, who Jesus would re-name Peter. Later, Jesus finds Philip; who then goes on to find Nathanael. And this is the way the number of those following Jesus grows: Jesus encounters some, inviting them to come and see, and those invite others – without coercion or manipulation – to come and be witnesses themselves; to discover the

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<sup>2</sup> As quoted by Alyce Mckenzie in “Stick Around,” *Patheos.com*

<sup>3</sup> David Lose, “Dear Working Preacher”

incarnated Jesus as he has become known within the community of his followers; what, today, we call the church.

We are now entering a new year that is filled with so many questions and uncertainties. Many of us know people who recently have been, are now, or might soon become infected with the coronavirus – it is more likely with this variant than any other. Our hospitals and schools are struggling with stress and fatigue. We do not know how, when, or if this pandemic will come to an end. Too many are already grieving losses and are fearful of what the future may hold.

One year ago, on the first Sunday of the new year, we talked about the Christian tradition of chalking the doors; marking the home where you abide as a place where Jesus, and those who might be looking for him, are welcome to enter. Despite the current obstacles of being together – and the real danger that stands, at least, in our immediate future – we crave ways to respond to and mirror Jesus' invitation to come and see and abide; to extend and receive grace; to more fully experience the incarnation – the Word made flesh and making his home among us.

Some of you may choose to practice that tradition again this year: to mark your door as an invitation to come and abide with God and with one another. Some of you may resolve, in this new year, to devote time spent in communion with God or in community with others; practicing the type of open hospitality described in this passage: seeking and finding, following and inviting, devoting time and attention, asking open questions and listening intently to their responses. You may resolve to pray for others, to keep in closer contact, or volunteer your time or talent in some new way. You may choose to focus on a concrete detail: maybe befriend a neighbor or work to repair a family relationship, possibly reduce your energy consumption or increase your level of physical activity, begin work on a new project or join in an advocacy group, practice Sabbath yourself or help someone else find rest.

For, if this year truly brings us toward the end of this pandemic – or, at least, to the close of this challenging and dangerous phase of it – then we will need our communities to help us to persevere, to cope, to grieve, and to heal. We will need safe places to abide with one another; we will need family and friends that will sit with us and listen to us and help us to process all that we are experiencing; we will need institutions and ministries that effectively respond to needs. We will need to know that Christ is, indeed, with us in our homes, in our schools and workplaces, in health care facilities and government agencies; that the incarnate God understands our pain and wants us to recover and thrive and live abundantly.

John presents Jesus – the Word made flesh, making his home among us – as choosing to be found; to be known by and among us. If God truly became human then we should not expect God would be immune to our hopes and fears, our joys and needs. In this new year, let us remember that God is present with us, always: on our doorframes and in our homes; inside the walls of our churches and outside of them, as well; in the bread that we break here today in communion and in the bread that we share with each other in our communities.

This year – as scary and uncertain and exhausting as it may seem on this, its second day – God will be with us. We have been invited to come and abide with Jesus, our Lord; to follow in his way, to find rest in his mercy, and to invite one another to share in his love. Thanks be to God. Amen.