

“Come and see!”
And be inspired ...

January 15, 2012

Text: Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18, John 1:43-51

I.

John’s gospel is perhaps the most rigorous of all the gospels. Its message is a tough message. By tough, I mean it asks something of us.

It won’t just leave us alone; it comes after us. It expects something of us. John’s gospel won’t let us *just* go through the motions on the sidelines of life.

With the gospel of John, the faith-seeker—the person seeking a deeper relationship with God—can’t just turn on the TV evangelist on Sunday morning. He/ she can’t just practice their faith on the computer, on line ... or, from a distance. John wants a commitment. He wants people to come to belief, to be inspired.

In our reading from John 1, **Nathanael**—who eventually becomes one of Jesus’ disciples—is somewhat of a cynic. He’s a doubter, also a procrastinator.

At the outset of this reading, Jesus calls **Philip** to become a disciple. And not long thereafter, Philip invites Nathanael:

We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote. He is Jesus of Nazareth, son of Joseph.

However, Nathanael is not impressed. For whatever reason, he has a low view of Nazareth. **Can anything good come out of Nazareth?** he asks.

Philip, then, says to him—words that are *critical* in John’s gospel—he says, **COME AND SEE!** And Nathanael comes ... and he soon learns that Jesus has great insight into his heart and spirit. For him, in **coming and seeing** Jesus, everything changes.

II.

In John’s gospel, **come and see** is a central theme. *Come and see*; no arm-twisting ... no gimmicks. No Bible thumping. No apparent pressure.

Just a simple, forthright invitation: come and spend time with Jesus and with those whom he’s calling to be his disciples ... as they seek to *live* and *proclaim* a new way of living. *Come and see*—with eyes of faith, allowing yourselves to be changed or renewed by *Christ’s spirit*.

This is what **Marcus Borg** has in mind in his book, *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time*:

Believing in Jesus, he says, is the movement from second hand religion to first hand religion ... from having heard about Jesus with the hearing of the ear ... to being in relationship with the Spirit of Christ.

It's a matter of a first hand encounter with God. But we have to *come and see*. We have to make an effort from our side. We have to risk opening ourselves to the Spirit.

Think, for a few moments, about your own faith journey. How did you first come to faith?

1. You might have been born in to a Christian faith situation, much like my family back at the Fourth Street Methodist Church in Aurora, Illinois. That was just what we did on Sunday mornings. We grew up in the church, as did many of you.
2. Or perhaps you came to faith through some special experience—like at a camp or some sort revival ... or through some unique experience with an individual or a group.
3. Or maybe you came to faith over the unfolding of the years; your coming just sort of built up over the long haul, over the ebb and flow of your daily life.

For John, faith comes (and our calling along with it) when we *come and see* Jesus. This *coming and seeing* is THE critical moment. It's what I like to call an **evangelical moment**. It's our moment to decide, to believe and to be called, redirected and reborn as a person of faith—as with Nicodemus in John 3, or the *woman at the well* in John 4. They came, they saw and they believed.

Again, we have to *come and see*. We have to risk getting close ... coming up to the front where we can see and touch and get involved. For John, when we *come and see*, suddenly a new world opens to us and *the Spirit of Christ* begins to fill our heart and spirit in new and empowering ways.

And almost instantly, we begin to see the world in terms of possibility and potential. Our whole orientation, our way of thinking and experiencing changes.

III.

Imagine, for a moment, a pile of rocks. CHECK IT OUT: A pile of rocks ceases to be a pile of rocks when someone has a cathedral in mind.

When you look at the world ... or at people, what do you see? Do you see piles and piles of rocks, or do you see cathedrals?

When Jesus first laid eyes on his would-be disciples, he didn't see a pile of rocks; he saw the beginnings of a cathedral. He looked at this scraggly bunch of salty, fishermen and—amazingly—he saw potential. He didn't see what they appeared to be; he saw what they *could* be.

Come and see and be inspired.

There was a man named Oscar who had been in the Church all his life. Over the years, he'd attended regularly for the most part. He'd given what he felt he could. From time to time, he would participate in some of the events of the church. But then his wife was diagnosed with **MS** (multiple sclerosis) ... and suddenly, he came to church with a whole new purpose.

He came, now, wanting answers for his questions. He came wanting *to see Jesus and believe and be inspired*. He came wanting inner peace for the turmoil in which he now found himself. He came wanting healing for his wife's brokenness. He came wanting *to believe* in healing and renewal. He'd no doubt heard about it ... we've all heard about it. But, now, he wanted to believe it.

IV.

In John's gospel, Jesus is the only one who can tell us who he is. Indeed, the overarching goal of the gospel of John is to answer the *christological question, WHO IS JESUS?*

And therefore, the moment of seeing him, of being in his presence ... experiencing his sage words, his compassion and love. **This is THE critical moment** for John.

In the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke), there's always a pointing toward the future ... toward some future event that will be ushered in; and in this future event our lives will be radically altered. Hope is linked to this future event. But who knows when all this will happen—some day of judgment and reckoning?

Interestingly enough, in John's gospel, there is no *final judgment*. There is no *day of reckoning*. For John, the end time is NOW. The **eschaton** (Greek for the *end times*) is now. The final truth of our lives is in seeing Jesus and being inspired—NOW. **Everything hinges on the moment.**

John promotes this sense of *realized eschatology*. Eschatology is the study of the end of things. Think about that with me for a moment. Seriously, how many of us put off any serious consideration of ultimate meanings in our lives, thinking, we still have time.

Some other time, we say. And suddenly we wake up one day, and that time has come and gone ... and it's too late.

John forces us to **get real about our lives today**. In other words, don't lose the moment. ***Come and see and be inspired.*** Make today count! Make the moment count!

V.

The gospel of John is not for the weak of heart or spirit. One biblical pundit noted: *It's not for wimps*. John's expectations for believers and prospective believers are high. What John is saying to us, friends, is ***be awake, pay attention*** ... and when the critical moment comes in your life, grab it.

Don't be timid! Don't hold back! GO FOR IT! Don't let it pass you by. Don't think: *some other time ... some more convenient moment.*

Critical moments come and go in all of our lives; and most likely, these moments are more plentiful than we are aware. And if we're not careful, if we're not awake, if we're not alive to the presence and the spirit of God in our lives, easily, we can miss out.

And every day, people—all over the earth—miss out. They let critical moments pass. They don't speak out when they should speak out. They don't turn left when they should turn left. They don't *act* or *go for it* when the spirit is calling them.

VI.

Back in 1978, psychiatrist M. Scott Peck wrote a book that was all the rage with my **baby boomer generation**. It was entitled, *The Road Less Traveled*. The thesis of the book centered around how—again and again—we have choices, decisions to make. And they make a difference.

1. We can choose **ONE ROAD**, one well traveled road that is secure and familiar and pain free. There will no struggle or suffering down this **well-traveled** road.
2. Or, we can choose another road, **ONE LESS TRAVELED** ... one that, although there is risk involved, is, nonetheless, a road we know we need to travel. It may well bring us some measure of *grief and sadness* ... some *discomfort and uneasiness* ... some *sweat and pain*, even. But it is a road that offers us a truth and a growth that we need to embrace. It is a road that offers us the sense of purpose our spirit has been longing for.

The question for us is, which road will we choose? The book suggests that **the road less traveled** is the road that leads to spiritual growth and maturation. Ultimately, it is the road that leads to a meaningful life.

VII.

Friends, what the Spirit is saying to us this morning is:

1. Today is the day to break out of our routine and *come and see*.
2. It is the day to put our computers and TVs aside and be *inspired*.
3. It is a day to come close ... to open ourselves—with abandon even—to the Spirit of Christ.

Come and see ... and catch the spirit. THINK ABOUT IT: Don't you want to be inspired—inspired to where you can be alive to the promises of God ...

- Alive to the power and the reaches of God's grace ...
- Alive to the wonder and the magnificence of God's love ...
- Alive to the renewal and joy of God's saving peace.

What John asks of us is a decision—a decision to truly *be* a follower of Christ; a decision—together—to BE the CHURCH—to BE Christ's presence in the world. When we're a follower of Christ, we're alive to love.

Come and see, says John. *Come and see this Jesus ...*

- the one whose **birth** Herod could not stop ...
- the one whose **voice** of compassion and love the Pharisees could not silence ...
- the one who, finally, **death could not contain**.

Come and see! Because love is the most powerful force in the world.

All praise be unto God! Amen!

Dr. Jeffrey E. Frantz
Miami Lakes Congregational Church, *United Church of Christ*
6701 Miami Lakeway South
Miami Lakes, FL 33014
On the web at www.mlcchurch.com

