

“Come and See”
John 1:29-42
Brentwood First Presbyterian
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Jesus invites you to baptism by the Spirit

The Gospel of John has been called the Spiritual Gospel. In today's lesson from the Spiritual Gospel, Jesus speaks to his followers. He makes things easier. He knocks on the door. All we have to do is open that door. We do not have to chase God down. God comes to us in Jesus. God always takes the first step. When we approach God, we go to one who is waiting for us.

The baptism to which John the Baptize refers is a baptism by the Spirit, the Hebrew word ruach. It is power like the rushing wind. It is life, the very dynamic of human existence. The coming of the Spirit into your soul is the coming of God. The power and life of God. The Spirit of God illumines our minds with powerful truth, and the courage to bring others to that truth.

But let us look at Jesus' first words in the Spiritual Gospel, the Gospel of John.

Jesus invites you to “Come and see!”

Jesus asks the two men who were to become his first two disciples, “What are you looking for?” Are you looking for security in money and the details of the law, like the Pharisees and scribes? This is not a bad aim, but it is a low aim. Are you looking for career, position, prestige, prominence, and power, like the Sadducees? This is not a bad aim, but again, it is a low aim.

Are you puzzled and bewildered, looking for God's light and God's forgiveness? Are you looking for God and God's will?

It happened for two men who would become disciples of Jesus, at 4PM one afternoon. At 4PM one Spring afternoon in Galilee, life becomes a new thing for two fishermen. Because they spend the whole day with Jesus. By spending the day with Jesus, they are baptized by God's Holy Spirit. Not a sheep dip that wears off the next day. They are soaked through and through, a penetrating immersion that does not wear off. Not a sheep dip. A soaking by the Holy Spirit. A commitment to spend the day with Jesus. At four o'clock one Spring afternoon in Galilee, the vocation of men, their vocation as disciples of Jesus begins. A decisive beginning point for their new life.

But if we make our schedule full with God, where do we make time for our friends and family?

Jesus invites you to bring others to come and see

If your life depended on it, could you name the twelve disciples? Probably not. I have a hard time remembering all of their names myself. Let's see: There was Peter, of course. And James, and John. There was Matthew, and Judas, of course. And wasn't there somebody named Philip? And Thomas...we all remember him. He was the doubter. But the one name we would be most likely to forget would be that of Andrew.

We might have missed him because he was not the sort of fellow who stood out in a crowd. He was not the sort who pushed himself out in front. He was a modest sort of man. He always seemed to be in the background. He was not a gifted public speaker, never wrote any books, was not prominent in anybody's society, and was never elected the chairman of any board. He was just a humble, hard-working fisherman. A very ordinary sort of fellow. He was not one of the outstanding characters of the New Testament. But Andrew had a Friend. And wherever we meet him on the pages of the New Testament, we find him introducing people to that Friend.

To Andrew, all that mattered was to be with Jesus, to serve him as well as he could... and to bring others to him.

Andrew's greatest joy is sharing the good news of Jesus, and brings others into his presence. Having found Jesus, he could not sit still, he could not help it. He had to share Jesus with others.

Andrew is so excited about the Spirit of God, he leads Peter to Jesus. Later, he brings the boy with 5 loaves and 2 fishes to Jesus. And still later, he brings the Greeks to Jesus. Andrew is a connector. He connects others to Jesus. He brings others to Jesus. He brings his relatives, he brings strangers, and he brings children.

Studies in Church Growth reveal that the most enthusiastic members in most churches are the newest members. They have an enthusiasm and a willingness to serve that some people who have been around the church for a long time have somehow misplaced. That is one good reason for a church to keep reaching out. New people bring excitement into a church. How do we invite new people to come to our church? We tell them about the excitement here, and we invite them to come and see.

Biblical scholars know that the question, "Where are you staying?" means, in essence, "Who are you? Where is the 'home,' the center of your life?" It would not be stretching things to translate the disciples' response as, "At this point we don't know whom we are following or where this path is leading. Can you tell us?"

Andrew bringing the young boy with the fish and loaves to Jesus reminds us dramatically of how important children and their resources are. Andrew's act shows us graphically how crucial it is for us in our words and deeds to bring children into the presence of Jesus.

How do we bring our children to Christ? By getting them involved in church and Sunday School and other activities, by telling them the stories of Jesus, by introducing them to

the power of the Scriptures, by teaching them to pray, by leading them to understand that some things are right to do and some things are wrong -- but even more, even more -- by letting them see us loving Jesus, serving the church, and living the faith every day with heart, soul, mind, and strength. This is what we learn from Andrew -- to bring our children to Jesus. To show them by example where our home is, where our center is.

Jesus looked at the brother Andrew brought to him, and saw in him more than a Galilean fisherman. He saw in Peter the rock upon which he would build his church. God our creator sees in you today not only who you are, but also who you can be. God our creator sees not just actualities, but also possibilities. Jesus says, give your life to God, and God will transform your life into even more.

The story is told of a judge who stared at a case-hardened criminal. "Because of the gravity of this case," he said, in mellow, earnest tones, "I am going to give you three lawyers." "Never mind three lawyers," replied the experienced defendant. "Just give me one good witness."

Only 60% of Americans say they attend religious services on a regular basis, even though 95% of America believes in God. Eighty-four percent say they believe that Jesus Christ is God or the Son of God; two-thirds say they have made a personal commitment to him. Yet, they stay away from church.

Why? Do they hate the institutional church? Some perhaps. But not most. Gallup figures indicate that almost three out of five of the unchurched...and they are defined as those who have not been to church for more than six months except for a holiday or special occasion - they might have their name on a roll somewhere, but they do not come...three out of five say they would "definitely" or "probably" or "possibly" return to the fellowship.

So why do they not come? There are lots of reasons that could be given. But I would be willing to bet that the biggest reason a lot of them do not come is because **NO ONE EVER ASKED THEM TO!**

Do we **HAVE** to ask? One man came out of his house on his way to church on Sunday morning just as his neighbor came out with his golf clubs. "Hey, Henry," the neighbor called, "Come play golf with me." The man said, "Sorry, it's Sunday, and Sunday means church." After a moment's silence, the golfer quietly said, "You know, Henry, I've often wondered about your church, and I have admired your faithfulness. You know I always invite you to play golf with me, but you have never invited me to go to church with you."

The lesson for you and me in incidents like that is that **WE DO HAVE TO ASK!** With Andrew, we have to extend an invitation. In a survey of twenty-two congregations in three major cities, newcomers were asked, "What brought you to this church?" The responses: 2%, an advertisement; 6%, an invitation by the pastor; 6% an organized evangelistic outreach program; and 86%, an invitation by a friend or family member. That is more than four out of five.

Why do we not do it? Do we like our church? Sure, or we would not be here ourselves. Do we have anything worth inviting folks to? Of course - there are good things always going on. Do we care about people? Absolutely! We have GOOD REASON to ask people to come and join us.

Permit me to offer a few suggestions. First, pray about your inviting. Ask God to help you identify those who will be most receptive to your invitation. As the Gallup poll indicates, there are plenty of them out there who are waiting for a chance, even an excuse, to get back to church.

Second, do not be content with offering simply a general invitation: "Come to church sometime." That is the same as saying, "Come see me sometime" or "Let's do lunch." The response will probably be a courteous, "Sure," and then never thought of again. Instead, make your invitation specific...to a particular service or special event – the executive director of the Outreach Foundation, the missionary arm of the Presbyterian church, is preaching next week. Our potluck with an exhibition of Guatemalan paintings on February 10, Wednesdays at 6, and so on.

Third, offer your invitation in times of special need. Times of stress, times of change, times of loss are all moments when people are longing for some GOOD NEWS in the midst of all the bad. We HAVE that good news, the news of a Savior who knows our needs and responds to us through a heart of love.

Fourth, invite your friends to come WITH YOU. People will be much more inclined to come if they know in advance that they will not be lost and alone in a sea of unfamiliar faces. Arrange to bring them or meet them at the church and sit together.

Fifth, be persistent. Just because your friend cannot come with you THIS week, do not assume that there is no interest. Do not be obnoxious, but ask again...and again...and again. After all, if we truly believe that a relationship with the risen Christ is something GOOD, we cannot be selfish about it.

Finally, do not get discouraged. If your friend just says no, do not blame yourself. You have done what you could and should have done. The Holy Spirit can take it from there.

Someone asked Michelangelo, as he was chiseling on a formless chunk of stone, what he was doing. He replied that he was releasing the angel imprisoned in the marble.

God sees the hidden potential in each of us, and releases that potential. Your hidden ability to be a connector. Someone who like Andrew connects other people to Jesus. Who brings other people to Jesus. Not just in grateful response to all that is given to you, but because you are genuinely excited about being in the presence of Jesus. The presence you feel in worship, and the Christian fellowship with others.

Conclusion

More than forty years ago there was a man who heard a call from God and answered it. He heard God ask him, "What are you looking for?" and he was able to answer: "I am looking for freedom and justice for all of God's people." And so, Martin Luther King, Jr., was able to give voice to the voice of God through the voice of his own passion.

"I have a dream that is deeply rooted in the American dream ... I have a dream that my four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character." And then all of us will be "free at last."

My friends, what are you looking for? What are you looking for? It is by asking and answering that question, with Jesus as your companion, that you will hear God's "call" to you. And then, you, too, will be free at last. Free to say to your friends and relatives and children, "Come and see."

All glory be to God, Hallelujah, and all God's children say ...