

“COME AND SEE”
JOHN 1:43-51
January 17, 2021

We are raised to be good people—God’s people worthy of God’s blessing. So how is it that in the Bible Jesus is blessed before he does anything miraculous and disciples are given Jesus’ blessing before they have done anything to earn it? Hear what the Spirit is saying to the people in John’s Gospel, Chapter 1, beginning with the 43rd verse:

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Follow me.” Now Philip was from Beth-say-da, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth.” Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.”

When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, “Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!” Nathanael asked him, “Where did you get to know me?” Jesus answered, “I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.” Nathanael replied, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” Jesus answered, “Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these.” And he said to him, “Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.”

Here ends the reading. May God bless these words as we seek to apply them to our lives.

In last week’s reading from the Gospel of Mark, Jesus is baptized and God exclaims in his ear, “You are my Beloved! In you I am well pleased.” Jesus gets to space himself right to the front of God’s VIP line while the Pharisees cry out to the heavens, “Foul! This isn’t fair; look at all we have done to live blameless, righteous lives. Look at our purity. Look at the evidence of our faithfulness to the law of Moses. Where is your blessing for us? Nothing good comes out of Nazareth. Jesus hasn’t *done anything* to earn your favor!” But God ignores their protests and instead, invites Jesus to *Come and See, come and see how you are the reflection of my love for all people, everywhere.*

The Pharisees' petitions to God change exactly nothing; their angry appeals for justice and heavenly recognition of their holiness are met with deafening silence. Life isn't fair and we are not nearly so influential with God as maybe we'd like to think we are. It's the same now as it was then. It's the mystery of our existence and our relationship with God.

Two truths are undeniable in the story of Jesus' baptism narrative:

1. He has done nothing to earn God's favor; and
2. He is the Beloved, in whom God is exceedingly pleased.

Fast forward to John's time, 25-30 years after Mark's, and John writes his Gospel from the city of Ephesus, 1000 miles from where Mark is living in Rome. As with the three synoptic writers: Mark, Matthew and Luke—John's gospel has a disciples' call narrative. Different characters though: John introduces us to lesser-known men than Peter, Andrew, and James. Nathanael and Philip fill the bill for John precisely because they are nobodies by anyone's accounting; they are Everyman. We hardly ever see their names again in any of the Gospels other than in a listing of the twelve where Nathanael might also be called Bartholomew.

Nathanael questions how Jesus, another unknown, could *possibly* be anyone special. After all, he comes from Nazareth, a small town of 200-300 people, and is the son of a laborer, not a nobleman or a Pharisee. *He hasn't done anything to warrant our respect*, he dismissively proclaims to Philip. But Philip has been called by Jesus already and has been inspired to follow him.

Philip next says three words that are some of the most important in all the Gospels. He simply says, "Come and see." *Come and see*. This is Jesus' call to us. Our holiness resumé is valueless. Our degrees, conferred titles, and accomplishments—the sum total of all our prayers, right living and good deeds-- well, they are all well and good, but they mean nothing in this job interview.

Jesus does for us what God does for him—Jesus blesses us without regard to whether we deserve it or not. He says to Philip, *Come and see what the disciple's life has in store for you. Come and experience God's unconditional love for you. Come and see how your life will be changed for the knowing of me, simply for the knowing of me.*

And Philip's first act as disciple is to likewise call Nathanael with those three words: *Come and see.* Jesus says to Philip and Nathanael, *Be with me. Be one of us. See how God will be revealed to you through me.* This call, per theologian Lee Barrett, is “not so much a call to mission as it is an invitation to an epiphany.” It is not a call to discernment and strategic planning: that the new disciples follow Jesus is not the fruit of any individual's deliberation and choice. It is, rather, a visceral response to a deep longing to know God in community with others struggling to understand how the face of God is revealed in Jesus our Christ. *Come and See.*

Today is a banner day in the life of our church, for it is the day three people have heard the call of Jesus to *Come and See.* UCC Parker Hilltop is the face of God revealed to our community and they have spoken their desire to be welcomed into this community in a deeper way, to be one of us, an active partner in our ministry.

We have welcomed you as our siblings in Christ not so much with a call to mission as an *invitation to your own epiphany.* This is your own opportunity for awakening—or perhaps *re-awakening* to the loving presence of God in your life. We have welcomed you as post-modern disciples of Jesus not because of what value you can bring to the church in terms of your skill-set, your money, or your pedigree, but because, like all the rest of us you see across the Zoom screens, you are a seeker, the Beloved in whom God is already unconditionally pleased.

Our UCCPH church family will be stronger and enriched by your presence and partnership. You will give to the church of your ministry heart—your time, your talent, and your support, because you *want to*, not because you have to. You

are not being drafted into forced service; you are being ushered instead to the head of the line where Jesus will whisper in your ear as was once whispered in his, *Come and See*.

Welcome Jon and Robert and welcome back, Kay, welcome to this imperfect, at times happy mess, our church family that is extending today our virtual hugs to you, our UCCPH community heart that will beat in time now with yours, our blessed and beloved church asking for and extending grace always in all things. When you now look into the face of God revealed in UCC Parker Hilltop, you will see your own reflection added to all of ours, the collective reflection of God's unconditional love. *Come and see*, come and see along with us what Jesus is calling us to be and do. Come just as you are, for you are enough and we welcome you as our own new Beloved UCCPH partners.

May It Be So.

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