

John 1:35-51

The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God!"

When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, "What do you want?"

They said, "Rabbi" (which means Teacher), "where are you staying?"

"Come," he replied, "and you will see."

So they went and saw where he was staying, and spent that day with him. It was about the tenth hour.

Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas" (which, when translated, is Peter).

The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, "Follow me."

Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

"Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" Nathanael asked.

"Come and see," said Philip.

When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, "Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false."

"How do you know me?" Nathanael asked.

Jesus answered, "I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you."

Then Nathanael declared, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel." Jesus said, "You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You shall see greater things than that." He then added, "I tell you the truth, you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

Have you ever met anyone famous? Any celebrities or political figures? I've had the opportunity to meet a few. I've met three governors. I met an actor from Northern Exposure, but I can't remember his name. I won an award in high school that sent me to a banquet with a whole pile of celebrity types. Lionel Richie. Chuck Yeager. Mary Lou Retton. Gerald Ford. Ed Asner. Elizabeth Taylor. It was kind of surreal to be with all those people.

Generally, those kinds of meetings are all the same. You say hello. You maybe get their autograph. You tell them how much you like what they've done. And that's it. Most of the time, they really aren't nearly as interested in finding out anything about you. It's very one-sided.

A few weeks ago, I was able to go hear Philip Yancey speak. He is a very well known Christian author. Afterwards, he was doing a book signing, and I would have had the opportunity to say hello. But I found myself wondering why I would do that. I wasn't really interested in getting his signature on a piece of paper. I would have been much more interested in sitting down with him at Starbucks and kicking around ideas. But of course, he had no reason to be interested in doing that with me, so I didn't offer the invitation.

We see much different interactions take place with Jesus in this story. Those people who approach him get much more than an autograph or handshake. It's our first introduction to what Jesus is going to be like, and we learn a great deal about him.

John points Jesus out to his two disciples. "There he is! That's the Lamb of God!" The Jews had been talking about prophecies in the Bible for thousands of years. There were a few key passages that gave clues as to the timing of the Messiah, and at the time Jesus came along, there was a lot of speculation about when and where the Messiah would show up.

Now usually, when we think of prophecies today, we think of the National Enquirer. Wild ideas that never come true and are not meant to be believed. But these were bona fide prophecies that were about Jesus. So when John made the connection, it was huge. This was THE person that the entire Jewish community had been waiting for for so long. Many people would have given anything to be alive during that time. It would have been amazing.

John points him out, and those two disciples of John went after Jesus. They recognized that there was something extraordinary about what John had seen. They didn't know exactly what, but they tagged along to see what would happen. And in the chain reaction of encounters that follow, we can find three bold questions that come up when we encounter Jesus today.

Jesus actually asks the first one. They are the first words of Jesus that John records for us. He says to those two disciples, "What do you want?"

The phrase should actually be translated “What do you seek? Or “What are you looking for?” What are you hoping to find?

I think the question may have caught them off guard. They were behind Jesus, trailing him. They might not have even known for sure that he was aware of their presence. But then he twirls around and suddenly they’re face to face with them. What do you want? What are you looking for?

That’s a question we all have to ask ourselves. What are we hoping Jesus can answer for us? Can we articulate what we’re needing from him? We won’t know if he’s answered our prayers if we don’t know what we’re looking for. Can we tell him? What do we want from him right now?

I don’t know if John’s disciples were prepared for that direct of a question. Their response was, “Where are you staying?” On a surface level, all they were really hoping to do was get his address so they could find him and know where he was when they needed him. I really don’t think they had any expectations beyond that.

But on a more spiritual level, that’s ultimately what everyone is asking God. Where can I find you? Where are you at work? Will you be sticking around?

It was a straightforward question in response to a straightforward question. And all Jesus would have had to do at that point was say, “Have you got a piece of paper? I’ll write it down for you.” Or, “I’m staying with Ben and Susanna who own the bakery.”

But Jesus gives a different response. He says, “Come and see.”

What the disciples came for was information. What they got was a conversation. They came for answers. What they found was The Answer.

Jesus says, “Come and See.” He wants us to have vision like John did. To have our spiritual eyes opened. The surprising thing about Christ’s answer “Come and see” is what follows in the story. It says that the disciples went and saw where he lived and stayed the day with him. Actually the Greek word for where Jesus stayed is where we get our word “remained.” And it’s the exact same word that’s used for what the disciples did – they “remained” the day with him.

It’s almost as if Jesus said, “You want to know where I hang out? I’ll show you.” And then he pulls up a chair and sits down with the people asking the question. He says, “The place I dwell, the place you’ll find me is right here with you. I don’t live in a building. I live in relationship.”

At the beginning of the book that we read a couple weeks ago, John wrote “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” What we find when we start a dialogue with Christ is that he’s inviting us to invite him to move in.

Revelation 3:20

Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him and he with me.

Matt 18:20

For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.

Jesus moves us like he did those disciples, from thinking about truth as concrete facts to learn like an address, to thinking about Truth as a person. We have to go from thinking about him as an abstract concept and realize that he's wanting a much more intimate and life changing encounter with us.

There's a song in the musical *Into the Woods* that says, "Careful the wish you make. Wishes come true – not free." Those disciples asked to know where Jesus lived, and they got their answer. But it wasn't the sort of answer they could just tuck away in the back of their minds. It radically altered the path of their lives.

As they experience that time with Christ, the two disciples of John are convinced themselves. And what it does is transform them into witnesses like John. It says the first thing Andrew does is go and find his brother and bring him to Jesus. The effect of an authentic encounter with Christ is the desire to share that experience with other people.

Of course, not everyone is going to be all that impressed by what we have experienced. I love the story of Nathanael hearing for the first time about Jesus. He is thoroughly uninspired by Philip's account. The Message translation puts it this way:

John 1:45-46

Philip went and found Nathanael and told him, "We've found the One Moses wrote of in the Law, the One preached by the prophets. It's Jesus, Joseph's son, the one from Nazareth!"

Nathanael said, "Nazareth? You've got to be kidding."

Nathanael was not about to be caught up in some emotional fad. As far as he is concerned, there is no credibility to this report. It would be like me hearing a very powerful speech on quantum physics by a young speaker. I go to Peter's house and say, "Peter you've got to come back for the 7:00 lecture tonight. This guy is incredible."

Peter might say to me, "Oh yeah? Where did he get his doctorate?" And I'd say, well, actually, he doesn't have one. He taught himself with a few classes online. But you won't believe how smart he is."

Peter's not going to buy it. He wants MIT, or at least a good state school. He wants some credentials, not some yahoo who learned on Yahoo.

Nathanael's skepticism is entirely healthy. Jesus came with no good pedigree. He was not even a rabbi's son – Joseph was a carpenter. Why should he be a religious leader to follow? Nazareth was a Podunk, no-name village with no more than about 200 people. It wasn't the sort of spot important people come from. Nathanael has every right to be hesitant.

His was the third bold question. Because we've all got Nazareths in our lives. Circumstances and experiences where we never expect to find God and we say "Can anything good ever come from there?" "Job stress! Can anything good ever come from there?" "Financial trouble! Can anything good ever come from there?" "Health problems! Marriage problems! National crisis! Can anything good come from these things?"

And you know what? When Philip responds to Nathanael, he does exactly the right thing. He doesn't try to defend Jesus. He doesn't try to explain it. He just uses the words that Jesus had spoken to John's disciples. "Come and see."

The only way to truly make up your mind about Jesus is to meet him for yourself. The only way to see him where you never expected is to look for him as if he might actually be there. You have to say, okay, I will act as if you are real. I'll come so far as to approach you and listen for your voice. I'll invite you in and I'll see if you show up.

That's a bold tactic. It was bold for Philip to lay down the challenge, and it was bold for Nathanael to accept. Too often, we're in one of their shoes. We're either afraid that someone will give Jesus a try and he'll fail, or we hesitate to try because we might discover that in fact he is real and we have to change. We'd rather raise our objections and stop the dialogue.

But Nathanael goes for it. And Jesus makes the most of the opportunity. Jesus has nothing but good things to say to him. He isn't bothered by a skeptical mind. In fact, he seemed to find it refreshing. Here was somebody who could be trusted to not have a false agenda, who wouldn't go along and pretend he didn't have an issue with something. Nathanael called it like he saw it, and Jesus appreciated that.

Jesus saw the good in Nathanael and started there. And you can see how quickly Nathanael responded to him. He was probably expecting Jesus to lecture him about not having enough faith, but instead, Jesus gave him validation and acceptance.

Mostly, we all want to be known and valued for who we are, and Jesus showed that he knew Nathanael. And he knew Nathanael long before Philip even told him about Jesus. He knows each of us by name. He sees us long before we even think about rejecting him. That's what draws us to him. As John wrote in another book, we love him because he first loved us.

Nathanael is so bowled over by all this that he gives Jesus every compliment he can think of. It's almost a comical turn around from a few verses earlier when he was so skeptical.

You can see the twinkle in Jesus' eye when he says to him, "That's all it took to make you believe? I can show you a whole lot more."

John the Baptist started a long chain reaction of people inviting other people to look and see who Jesus is, and it has carried right down to us today. When we see him for who he really is, Jesus says, "There's so much more to see." We will see heaven opened up, because he is the bridge that connects here and there. Those first disciples wanted to see where he lived. Jesus says, "Where I live now is with you. And I'll take you to my forever home when this life is over and we will spend eternity together."

We're going to share in communion in a few moments. If you haven't been here for a communion service, we have two stations at the front. Derek will come and lead us in a few songs, that will help us reflect on the Lord and his sacrifice. And whenever you feel ready, come to the front and dip a piece of bread into the juice and eat it. Our communion table is open to anyone who has put their faith in Jesus as their Savior. If you haven't done that, we would ask that you just enjoy the music and not participate in communion, since it wouldn't have any meaning. But if you want to know more about what it means to say you believe in Jesus, by all means talk to me or someone else afterwards.

As we prepare to take communion, ask yourself these questions:

What am I wanting from God right now? What am I seeking?

Have we invited him to make his home with us? Are we in the conversation with him?

What is my Nazareth? Where is the last place in my life I would expect to find him?

Jesus is saying "Come and see." The invitation is there. And as we respond, we can expect to be changed for a lifetime. "Look!" John says. "The Lamb of God." He's here tonight. We remember him as that lamb, who died so we could have life. Come and see.