

John 1:43-51, Second Sunday after the Epiphany, January 17, 2020

"Come and See!"

When I was a kid, I got together with the two other boys in our neighborhood who were my age, and we built what we thought was the most wonderful treehouse ever built. We gathered some old two-by-fours from my neighbor's garage, found some pieces of plywood in my dad's shed, scrounged up some 16 penny nails and some smaller ones. We borrowed our fathers' tools, hammers, tape measures, and saws and headed across the road to the small patch of woods that was there on the hillside. We found a suitable tree and began construction. It turned out to be a great treehouse, but I think there might still be a hammer or two laying there in the dirt that never found its back to the toolbox.

When we got on the school bus the next day, we couldn't wait to tell our friends about our fantastic new hangout. To our surprise though, they were skeptical that we could build a treehouse that was as great as we said ours was. We were so excited about what we had done we simply told them to "come and see." When they came and saw, they were impressed with the place too; so impressed, in fact, that we couldn't get rid of them. Our invitation had done all that we expected and more.

It's true for most of us that when we make, find, or get something we think is absolutely wonderful we are quick to tell others about it. A new car, a good restaurant, or a new home are things we can't wait to share with our families and friends. And if the thing we think is so great sounds too good to be true, we might have to invite them to "come and see." It might turn out that, once they accept our invitation, they will go out and buy the same kind of car, try the same restaurant, or even buy or build a very similar house. A simple invitation can lead to a chain reaction, the effects of which we might not even imagine as one after another, people invite each other to "come and see" some wonderful thing or another.

Today's Gospel lesson makes me think of one such invitation that I'm especially thankful that I got. When I was about twelve years old, one of my neighbors told me about the great Vacation Bible School program his church had. He told me that this Bible School program actually made it fun to go to church and learn about how Jesus could change our lives. When I seemed skeptical that church and Jesus could actually be fun, he simply invited me to "come and see." Well, I came and saw, and the rest" as they say, is history.

You see, my friend was like Philip in the story John gives us this morning. Jesus found Philip and Philip realized that Jesus was someone special. When Jesus called Philip to follow him, Philip didn't just go along alone, he invited his friend Nathanael to come and meet the one "about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth." Philip was so excited about finding Jesus he had to share the good news with his friend Nathanael, just like we had to tell our friends about our treehouse, and just like my young friend wanted to share with me the good news about his Vacation Bible School. Philip and my neighbor were overcome by a natural desire to do evangelism. They were so excited about Jesus they wanted to show him to their friends.

I think that most of you would agree with me that evangelism one of the most important things God calls us to do. I find it somewhat ironic, though, that we have to make a conscious effort to emphasize something in our faith lives that comes so naturally in so many other areas of our lives. We have no problem telling our friends about cars, restaurants, movies, or TV shows that we think are wonderful. When we move into a new

home, it's not hard to invite our friends to "come and see." But when we find the One who died on the cross so that we could be freed from the power of sin in our lives, who do we tell? When we get to know the One who promises to walk with us through even the very worst times in our lives, with whom do we share him? When we come to know Jesus as the Lord and Savior of our lives why do we suddenly become shy about inviting our friends to "come and see" what we have found? Why do we have to remind ourselves to practice evangelism; to share the good news of God's love with our friends and neighbors?

For one thing, we might feel overwhelmed by what we think is the enormous task of saving the world. Though we are called to "make disciples of all the world," we might need to be reminded that no one of us is responsible for the whole world. Jesus didn't call all twelve disciples at once, Philip didn't invite the whole city of Bethsaida to come and see Jesus, and we are not expected to proclaim the gospel to thousands of people at once. We can simply share the Good News with one person at a time and let the Holy Spirit work from there.

And, speaking of the Holy Spirit, we don't have to feel obligated to convince our friends and neighbors that they should come to know Jesus in the same way we do. Evangelism is not making a convincing argument for believing in God or presenting enough evidence to make folks believe in Jesus. After all, how many of us have come to faith in Jesus Christ because it was the logical thing to do?

In *The Small Catechism* Martin Luther explains that "by my own understanding or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ or come to him." He goes on to explain that it is the Holy Spirit who "calls, gathers, enlightens, and makes holy the whole Christian church on earth." Evangelism is inviting others to come and see God for themselves, to meet Jesus as we know him, and then letting the Holy Spirit go to work calling them and making them holy. If we are shy about telling others about Jesus because we can't argue like a Philadelphia lawyer, we can stop worrying, the Holy Spirit takes on that work for us.

Sometimes I think we don't get excited about evangelism because we simply don't realize the wonderful gift we have been given in Jesus. *The Interpreter's Bible* says that sometimes "We forget that we are the body of Christ, his feet that must run for him, his hands that must carry for him, his body through which his blessed will gets itself done; we forget that if Christ is all we say he is, we cannot keep him to ourselves, we must share him with others."

We might shy away from talking about our faith in God because others might find it hard to believe. We might not tell others about our relationship with Jesus because we are afraid that we might be accused of exaggeration. But how can we exaggerate salvation from sin or eternal life in the kingdom of God? Our faith is something to get excited about! Give your friends the chance to get excited too.

Jesus called Philip, Philip invited Nathanael, and when Nathanael met Jesus he believed because Jesus already knew him. Nathanael believed Jesus was a Rabbi, the Son of God, the King of Israel because Jesus told him he had seen him under the fig tree. But Jesus tells him, "You ain't seen nothin' yet!" Nathanael's eyes were opened a little bit because Philip was excited enough, and cared for him enough, to introduce him to Jesus. Jesus now assures him that he will soon come to see Jesus as the very revelation of God on earth.

When we introduce others to Jesus, when we invite them to come and see, we help to open their eyes a little. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, they come to believe in Jesus and know him as the revelation of God's grace in their lives. We know how exciting it is to know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. We have faith in the Holy Spirit to open the eyes of those who God calls

through our invitations to come and see. When we remember those things, evangelism will come naturally, both individually and as a community of believers. May God open our hearts and our minds to invite others to come and see Jesus, "about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus Son of Joseph from Nazareth, King of Israel, Son of God." Amen.