

He said to them, "Come and see."

You have likely heard those words before, and not just in the context of the Gospel lesson from John that we just heard. These words of invitation are found throughout the Old and New Testaments, but it is more likely that you have heard someone else say these or even said these words yourself. If you can recall being a child or have spent much time with children, you will have heard the words "come and see." "Come and see what I built." "Come and see what I painted." "Come and see this bird, or bug, or shiny rock." "Come and see my game, my play, or my performance." "Come and see how I dressed my little brother." The other day as I was loading the dishwasher, the correct way, I heard Greyson yell, "daddy, come and see, quick, quick, quick." His words were so full of excitement and joy, with a tinge of urgency. "I'm doing the dishes buddy, can you tell me about it," "No, you have to come and see." Sitting back and just asking them to tell you about whatever it is isn't adequate. They are inviting us into a relationship and know that information is an inadequate substitute for relationship. They aren't the same thing. In these moments the only thing you can do is to go and look.

I got up to see for myself and discovered him holding up a completed 1000-piece puzzle with his two hands, precariously dangling, but not a single piece falling. He was sooo proud of himself and his words were an invitation to share in this amazing new discovery. He was inviting me to share in his world, to participate in his life. When children say to us, "come and see" they are inviting us to participate in their lives, to allow our lives and their lives to come together as one.

Perhaps you haven't heard a child say, "come and see", but maybe you remember saying it when you were a child. You saw or did something, or something happened, and you just couldn't keep it to yourself. "Come and see" you yelled to your friends, or siblings, or your parents. You were inviting that other person to enter into and be a part of your life. The invitation to "come and see" isn't just limited to children though. Adults do it also. We invite our spouses and partners, our friends, and colleagues, to come and see our lives; to come and see our accomplishments and the results of our hard work. And, hopefully we are not too proud to invite others to come and see our pain and our struggles also. Likewise, we want to be invited to see the lives of others. On some level these are Epiphany moments, moments when God reveals God's life in us and among us.

Regardless of what season of life we are in, we can all recognize the words “come and see” because we never outgrow the desire to invite and to be invited, to share our lives with others in deeper and more meaningful ways. We never outgrow the desire to participate in something more, something greater than ourselves. This desire stems from having been created in the image and likeness of God. Jesus knows this about us. When John’s disciples ask, “Where are you staying?” he doesn’t give them information, he extends an invitation. He doesn’t draw a map or give directions; he invites them into a relationship. “Come and see.”

I am convinced, that there has never been a more pressing need in the history of humanity than now to accept Jesus’ invitation to come and see. We so often allow political agendas, social media posts and influencers, talk radio personalities, and powerful entities tell us what to think rather than to help us learn about the world and how to engage with it. Also, are church leaders, people like me, called to tell you exactly what to believe, or are we called to provide insight and context to scripture and doctrine, to journey with you as we all discover the mystery of Jesus’ presence in our lives?

We covet and idolize the things other people have, what other people do, what they look like, who they are, rather than discovering the awesome and beautiful ways that God reveals Himself in and through our own lives. Accepting an invitation allows us to experience something firsthand rather than simply hearing information or learning about something secondhand. Would you rather be told about how beautiful a pasture of wildflowers is or to actually stand in the sea of greens, reds, purples, pinks, yellows, and white? Would you rather hear a love story or fall in love and live a love story? Would you rather watch a cooking show on television or be right there amidst all the sights, sounds, and smells and taste what the chef is preparing? Would you rather know about Christ or to know Christ? This is the difference between invitation and information. Faith that is experienced personally, is a faith that is deep and wide, it is sustainable, it is incarnational, it is transformative. Our relationship with Christ, with one another, and with ourselves therefore must be a direct personal firsthand experience.

A firsthand experience with Christ doesn’t let us remain where we are, we are moved to a new place, opened to a new reality, turning our lives in a different direction. Christ is always coming towards us and when we

recognize our encounters with Christ, we must choose to either be spectators or participants in his life. Our patron, John the Baptist presents this choice to his disciples.

John again was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!"

Would they stay or go? They were with an incredible person, their beloved leader. They had to decide. They had likely heard John speak frequently and passionately about the one he was preparing the way for, and now the Messiah was here. Would they settle with staying with John, in a familiar setting, simply hearing information about the Lamb of God, or choose to open themselves to something different and new and actually experience the life of and a life in Christ? The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. "When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, "What are you looking for?" They said to him, "Rabbi, Teacher, "where are you staying?" He said to them, "Come and see."

These first disciples let go of the familiar and comfortable, opening themselves to something different. We have likely all experienced times like that. Letting go of the known and embracing the mystery of life in Christ can be hard. It usually means there are more questions than answers. "What are you looking for?" and "Where are you staying?" are not so much questions that can be answered as they are experiences begging to be lived. A personal firsthand experience with Christ invites us to discover the answers by living the questions.

This week a few dozen people gathered at Paris Mountain State Park outside of Greenville for our monthly Holy Hike. Standing inside the ruins of an old house on top of a mountain we joined together for the office of Noonday Prayer. Members of our group offered up prayers for people in their lives who are struggling in one way or another. I asked prayers for a family member battling brain cancer. Afterward I had a great conversation with Meg and Jerry Holt. Jerry said "If I didn't have faith, I don't know what I would turn to during the really hard times in life." He's right because without God, when things go wrong, too often people turn to the wrong things, to destructive things, to the bottle, the needle, the pill. People turn to despair, anger, and hatred.

Yet when you choose to experience Christ firsthand, you are equipped to let his light shine through you when you encounter others. When a friend, family member, or coworker asks how you have been able to cope with the loss of a loved one, how you deal with aging with grace, how you have the peace of mind and spirit to be kind to a stranger, you can say “come and see.”

When Jesus invites us to “come and see” we can be assured that he has something for us. He is opening himself to us and inviting us in. The way is prepared for us because Christ has gone before us. No matter what is going on in our lives, Christ makes it safe to take those steps forward in confidence that we are walking into Christ’s life and presence.

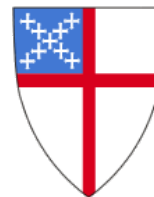
Jesus says, “Come and see” to these first couple of disciples and he also invites us to “come and see.” I wonder what he wants to show you? In what ways does he want to share his life with you? How is he asking you to participate in his life, and in the life of this world? Now, when you look at your life, what do you see, what is it like?

Is what you see rich and plentiful? “Come and see.” Is it empty and desolate? “Come and see.” Is it a life of loss and sorrow? “Come and see.” Is it one of joy and celebration? “Come and see.” Are you feeling lost or confused? “Come and see.” Is it easygoing and effortless? “Come and see.” Are you weighed down by guilt, shame, and despair? “Come and see.” However you might describe your life, Jesus always responds the same way.

Every life, every experience, every situation echoes with Jesus’ invitation to “come and see.” Christ is there offering himself as the way to experience your truest self, your truest life. But don’t believe me just because I am up here saying it. Christ is inviting you to something awesome. Go see for yourself.

The Lessons Appointed for Use on the Second Sunday after Epiphany

Year A
RCL



Isaiah 49:1-7
1 Corinthians 1:1-9
John 1:29-42
Psalm 40:1-12

The Collect

Almighty God, whose Son our Savior Jesus Christ is the light of the world: Grant that your people, illumined by your Word and Sacraments, may shine with the radiance of Christ's glory, that he may be known, worshipped, and obeyed to the ends of the earth; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Old Testament

Isaiah 49:1-7

Listen to me, O coastlands,
pay attention, you peoples from far away!
The LORD called me before I was born,
while I was in my mother's womb he named me.
He made my mouth like a sharp sword,
in the shadow of his hand he hid me;
he made me a polished arrow,
in his quiver he hid me away.
And he said to me, "You are my servant,
Israel, in whom I will be glorified."
But I said, "I have labored in vain,
I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity;
yet surely my cause is with the LORD,
and my reward with my God."

And now the LORD says,
who formed me in the womb to be his servant,
to bring Jacob back to him,
and that Israel might be gathered to him,
for I am honored in the sight of the LORD,
and my God has become my strength--
he says,

“It is too light a thing that you should be my servant
to raise up the tribes of Jacob
and to restore the survivors of Israel;
I will give you as a light to the nations,
that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”

Thus says the LORD,
the Redeemer of Israel and his Holy One,
to one deeply despised, abhorred by the nations,
the slave of rulers,
“Kings shall see and stand up,
princes, and they shall prostrate themselves,
because of the LORD, who is faithful,
the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you.”

The Psalm

Psalm 40:1-12

Expectans, expectavi

- 1 I waited patiently upon the LORD; *
he stooped to me and heard my cry.
- 2 He lifted me out of the desolate pit, out of the mire and clay; *
he set my feet upon a high cliff and made my footing sure.
- 3 He put a new song in my mouth,
a song of praise to our God; *
many shall see, and stand in awe,
and put their trust in the LORD.
- 4 Happy are they who trust in the LORD! *
they do not resort to evil spirits or turn to false gods.
- 5 Great things are they that you have done, O LORD my God!
how great your wonders and your plans for us! *
there is none who can be compared with you.
- 6 Oh, that I could make them known and tell them! *
but they are more than I can count.
- 7 In sacrifice and offering you take no pleasure *
(you have given me ears to hear you);
- 8 Burnt-offering and sin-offering you have not required, *
and so I said, "Behold, I come.
- 9 In the roll of the book it is written concerning me: *
'I love to do your will, O my God;
your law is deep in my heart.'"

- 10 I proclaimed righteousness in the great congregation; *
 behold, I did not restrain my lips;
 and that, O LORD, you know.
- 11 Your righteousness have I not hidden in my heart;
 I have spoken of your faithfulness and your deliverance; *
 I have not concealed your love and faithfulness from the great congregation.
- 12 You are the LORD;
 do not withhold your compassion from me; *
 let your love and your faithfulness keep me safe for ever.

The Epistle

1 Corinthians 1:1-9

Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes,

To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind-- just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you-- so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

The Gospel

John 1:29-42

John saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.' I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel." And John testified, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God."

The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!" The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them,

“What are you looking for?” They said to him, “Rabbi” (which translated means Teacher), “where are you staying?” He said to them, “Come and see.” They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o’clock in the afternoon. One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. He first found his brother Simon and said to him, “We have found the Messiah” (which is translated Anointed). He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, “You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas” (which is translated Peter).

Optional parts of the readings are set off in square brackets.

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