

John 1:35-51
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January 4, 2026

Come and See

Happy New Year, dear ones, and happy second Sunday of Christmas. Yes, it is still Christmas, and not just because I'm still packing away boxes and doing my best to keep a beautiful poinsettia alive. In the Christian calendar we are still walking through the Twelve Days of Christmas. While it feels a bit odd and out of sync with the larger world, I am grateful for one more Sunday with the candles, and a bit more time to ease not simply into a new calendar year, but into Epiphany, when a bit more about who Jesus Christ is to and for the world is revealed. As you likely remember, Epiphany is celebrated on January 6 and recalls the wise ones who arrive with gifts to honor the child king. This year we are walking together through the gospel of John, and while there is no mention of magi or a star in this telling, there is a gentle power to the way we are invited to understand more fully who this Jesus, God's Word made flesh is.

[Read John 1:35-51]

These first disciples seem almost childlike, even playful, don't they? They start trailing behind Jesus and when he asks them what they are looking for, they ask where he is staying. My mother might have been appalled by my audaciously inviting myself into a stranger's home, but Jesus is unfazed. He responds to their curiosity with an invitation, "Come and see." Come and see. Come and experience. Come and witness. Come and see. It's a different way of being invited into following Jesus than we might be used to. There's no job description, no initial list of expectations or demands, other than being curious and accepting the invitation.

We are not told what Andrew sees, hears, tastes, smells, or feels when he spends the day in Jesus' presence. Apparently his experience is enough to prompt him to tell his brother Simon that in Jesus Andrew has found the Messiah. I don't get the sense that Jesus is wowing anyone with astounding feats of power or strength during those hours with Andrew and the other curious one. They simply spend time in his presence, likely in conversation, perhaps sharing a meal or two. No pyrotechnics needed. And it is enough to spur these two to invite others to come and see, too.

I can't be sure what brought you to worship this morning. Maybe you are here because you're always here on Sunday morning. Maybe you're here because someone—your mother, your spouse, your neighbor, your child—expects you to be here. Maybe you're here because you made a New Year's resolution to go to church more regularly. Maybe you have questions. Maybe you're not entirely sure why you're here. Whatever the reason, I'm glad you're here. As I have said before, we are better and more faithful with you in our midst, and whatever your story, whatever your questions, you are welcome here. And I mean it. Especially the part about the questions, and your showing up with those questions, because questions and curiosity are central to the life of faith, as are doubts and even skepticism.

That's another piece of this story, of course: Nathanael and his skepticism. While everyone else is getting swept up in the buzz around Jesus, Nathanael isn't so sure. After being invited by Jesus to follow him, Philip seeks out Nathanael to tell him what and who he has found in Jesus. Unlike the others who are curious and captivated, Nathanael has his doubts: "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" There's a story behind Nathanael's question, and while the gospel writer does not fill us in, we can imagine at least some of what that story might be.

Maybe he has fixed ideas about what a messiah should do and be, and a man from an unassuming backwater like Nazareth does not match what Nathanael has in mind. Maybe Nathanael has been burned by other would-be messiahs. Maybe he has gotten his hopes up before, only to have them dashed or at least disappointed. Or maybe he is simply skeptical by nature, reluctant to jump on a bandwagon and trust that Jesus really is who the others are convinced he is. Whatever his story, no one begrudges Nathanael his doubts. Philip invites Nathanael—skepticism, doubts and all—to come and see, along with everyone else. And Jesus enthusiastically welcomes him, celebrating his honest, questioning ways.

There are multiple good reasons to be skeptical of Jesus and those who claim to follow him at the moment. The world grows more hostile by the second. Loud voices insist that they alone know the will of God, convinced that God is on their side versus other humans in other places who bear the same divine image that you and I do. I confess that I am tempted to get loud, too, to shout down those with whom I disagree, thinking that I can change their minds by shaming them or proving them wrong. And that is why this powerful quiet moment at the beginning of John's gospel is such a crucial call, at least to me this morning. In these encounters with the first disciples, I hear a challenge to let go of my ideas and my agendas and my fixed notions of who Jesus is and who he calls me to be. To be clear, I do not believe that Jesus is calling me to abandon the world and hunker down in a private room with him and a few friends. No, I sense he is calling me, calling us back to begin with *him* again, to come and see, to witness anew who he is as God's Word made flesh in God's embattled and beloved world so that we can embrace and serve that world in his name. And if we are to embrace this calling and accept Christ's invitation, we will need to lean heavily on curiosity.

Too often we write off curiosity as a trait belonging to children or cats or nosy neighbors. One of my favorite contemporary thinkers, Coach Ted Lasso has been known to say, “Be curious, not judgmental.” And in our current moment, I am convinced that genuine curiosity—paired with a heaping healthy dose of humility—is a holy gift, a spiritual discipline that requires courage and commitment. It is easy to maintain a posture of stubborn certainty; curiosity poses a bit more of a challenge, because curiosity requires an openness to being surprised or even proven wrong. Curiosity is also crucial to our having any hope of understanding who Jesus is and who he is calling us to be in his name. It is curiosity that spurs the first two disciples to ask Jesus where he is staying; it is curiosity that leads Simon Peter to go with his brother to meet Jesus; it is curiosity that prompts a skeptical Nathaniel to see what all the fuss is about. Holy curiosity is the first step in their walk with Jesus, as it is with ours.

Whether we’ve been Jesus followers for decades or for a matter of hours, whether we have stayed the course or wandered far afield more times than we can count, I hope we can each hear this invitation to come and see as we begin this new year.

If you are willing, I invite you to close your eyes. Take a deep breath. In this moment, what do you wonder about Jesus? What are you curious about regarding him? What are your hopes or doubts about him? How or where might he be calling us to come and see?

Lest we forget, we are not called to know all the answers or to have everything all figured out, which is a blessed relief, at least to me. We are instead invited to risk being curious in the face of a larger culture that insists on certainty and absolutes. We are called to unclench our jaws and uncross our arms and to take a new first step as we respond to the Word made flesh in our midst with open ears, open eyes, open hearts, and open minds. Because by the

grace of God, we too are called by God's Word made flesh, the Lord of all, to come and see. I'm curious to see where he leads us. Aren't you?

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.