

**Date: Sunday January 15, 2012**

**Scripture: John 1:43-51**

**Title: “Come and See”**

**The Message of Scripture (Sermon Thesis): We are all invited to “Come and See” just as Philip asked Nathanael to come and see and in so doing changed lives for the better.**

**The Sharing of the Good News (The Sermon Purpose): When we change the world changes and when that happens through following Jesus Christ it will be very good news.**

**(Remember, it’s all about God!)**

A man was going to try and cross homing pigeons with woodpeckers. That way, he figured, when the birds flew back home, they would knock at the door (Hinds). Now I share that tidbit of information because we all have preconceived ideas about things like what homing pigeons and woodpeckers are supposed to do. Plus, some of you might be thinking, yeah, sounds like something a guy would try to cross those two birds. So whether it be birds, gender, age, color, ethnicity, or something else, we all have biases and prejudices.

Even when we think we have done a lot of conscious work to be fair and open-minded, we carry implicit judgments. I read this week about an on-line exercise called the Implicit Association Test (IAT). The IAT offers a series of ten-minute, rapid-choice, visual options that can help reveal the unconscious ways we implicitly make value judgments about age, race, religion, and other things. I was so intrigued by what I was reading about this test that I signed up and took one of the tests only to find out that I had an age bias that was quite surprising to me. I

was also saddened, but unfortunately not to surprised to read, that many who take the test associate good qualities somewhat more strongly with images of people with lighter skin rather than darker skin. There are so many ways that we interpret and judge information based on implicit unconscious associations. If you are interested in finding out more about this online test, let me know and I can give you the details.

Well, all this talk about prejudice and bias feeds right in to today's gospel lesson where we hear the question being asked, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46, NRSV). Nathanael asks this question and he thinks he knows just about all he needs to know about Jesus when he learns that Jesus is from Nazareth. I remember getting similar vibes when I lived in St. Louis. The number one question when you meet someone there is, "Where did you go to high school?" Then you are classified depending upon your response. To make it worse, if you were from out of town, like I was, there was an almost dismissive response as if the other person might be saying, "can anything good come out of . . . ?", wherever it was that the person being asked might have gone to high school. For me, that was Iowa, and so the implication was, "Can anything good come out of Iowa?" Actually, I still know many who like to ask that question.

Well, an archeologist named Charles Page believes that Jesus' hometown of Nazareth was a small, somewhat isolated village. Nearly everyone living there was part of an extended family of the clan of David. Page says it was likely that they were an ultra-conservative, orthodox, separatist sect of Judaism expecting the

Messiah to come from among their own family line.

Compare that to, Philip, and presumably Nathanael, being from Bethsaida. Page says that Bethsaida was probably like the nearby town of Capernaum where Jesus eventually settled for awhile. Those towns were fairly cosmopolitan, influenced by their proximity to the primary traffic way connecting Egypt and Mesopotamia and the influences of those traveling the traffic way. The synagogues in those communities were led by Rabbis who may have had a more progressive understanding of their religion, one in which today's Reform Rabbis might trace their heritage.

So we've got a potential cultural clash when Philip tells Nathanael as described in today's gospel reading that, "We've found him . . . Jesus son of Joseph of Nazareth." Nathanael asks doubtfully, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip replies, "Come and see."

The significant thing for me in all this is that Nathanael is able to set aside whatever he thinks about some prophet coming from that isolated, backwash, village of Nazareth, and he investigates a bit. He asks questions and listens to the answers. That takes some suspension of preconceived notions and ideas. Then when Nathanael hears things that don't fit with his prior assumptions, Nathanael is willing and able to change his thinking. He's able to let some new truth in. New observations and new experiences change some of his prearranged categories. This guy, Jesus from Nazareth, is not so bad. In fact, Nathanael discovers, Jesus is wonderful. And from now on, Nathanael will be doing a lot of mind expanding

things. When he throws his lot with Jesus, he'll find he's on a journey that will require him to change a lot of what he thought he knew to be true.

That's what can happen when people accept an invitation; an invitation with the words, "Come and see" like Philipp used. Those are words that can be used for multiple applications including an invitation to visit Immanuel. Come and see our church.

Most people will visit a church because someone invites them. "Come and see." As I have said before, using the words "Come and See" with your church is not that different than using the words for a new restaurant you have discovered or an exciting new movie you have enjoyed. Saying, for instance, I really get a lot out of the worship at Immanuel. Come and see. I love our music at Immanuel. Come and see. We have the best pastor. Come and see. We feed kids during the summer. Come and see. Those words, and I know some of you do use them, may help people overcome their ideas and beliefs about our church. Assumptions, not to mention lives, might get changed just by using the words, come and see.

I think it's also important for us to share with one another with a Philip-like openness. What is feeding your spiritual life now? What gives meaning or peace to you? Tell the Nathanael's in your life about that. Maybe you've started reading morning devotions and they help you to begin your day based on scripture and prayer. Maybe you've started using quiet time to remember your centeredness in God. Maybe you've started reading a book or saying nighttime prayers with a child or with your own adult self. Tell somebody about that. "I think I've found

something that makes a difference for me.” That echoes Philip’s words: “We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote...” It might be that when you share with others what is important to you and your faith that you’ll get a dismissive response like what happens with the high school question in St. Louis, but you never know what might happen when the Lord is involved. Come and see.

It is also important to remember that we are a faith community. And it is important for us in a faith community to know that when we share with each other, when we offer to one another the important things that are making a difference to us, the Spirit is involved and whenever Spirit is present, things tend to get shaken up a bit and change for the good.

Without those Spirit-prompted exchanges, we’d all just live in our preconceived worlds, comfortable and somewhat blinded by our assumptions and our own customary practices. When we are blind, we won’t even see the Nathanael’s out there sitting under their fig trees like Jesus did. Oh, that’s just some guy from Bethsaida. He might as well be invisible. Or worse yet, we probably wouldn’t ever follow someone from Nazareth.

You see, come and see also means for us to see the other, especially the other who is different from us; the other who often gets overlooked or ignored. During this weekend for remembering and recognizing the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., it is important to lift up that he invited us to come and see. Come and see a nation where people are judged on the basis of their skin, or where the live,

or what they look like. But more importantly, he also invited to come and see a nation of his dreams, where the content of character counts more than the color of one's skin. A nation where all of God's children, black and white, Jew and Gentile, Protestant and Catholic, will all join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, "Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last" (MLK, "I Have a Dream")!

Can anything good come out of the words come and see? Who knows? That's all up to us to use the words and find out and Jesus invites us to do just that. So we have to take responsibility for our spiritual lives and walk in his way. Then when we discover the things that bring meaning and coherence to our lives, like Philip did, we can share them with the Nathanael's in our lives. We can tell about what we've experienced and invite others to "come and see." When we encounter something new that is contrary to our ideas and beliefs, like Nathanael did, we can investigate a bit. We can ask questions and listen to answers. We can be willing to change when we learn about things that don't fit our categories. And when we change, as followers of Jesus Christ, the world will change, and when that happens it is very good news. Come and see. Let us pray.

Lord,

Over and over again we hear you call to us, by name, to come and see what you are doing and yet we often ignore the call. Today we recommit to your call and to following you. This world truly needs you and fellowship in your name. This we pray, Amen.

Offering: In order for others to see what is happening at Immanuel, we must give to Immanuel. As a faith community called by God, let us give generously. The ushers will please . .

Dedication: Lord, with this offering we commit to changes yet to be. Help us move through our fears to change the world. Accept and bless this we pray. Amen.

Benediction: We are called by name, we are blessed, and now we are sent forth.

And so we go in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen and Amen.

Sources:

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