

Epiphany/Baptism of Our Lord

January 7, 2018

Haven Lutheran Church, Hagerstown MD

Readings: Psalm 66: 1-5; John 1: 29-51

It's "*Come and See*" Sunday. The appearance of a new star said, "come and see" to some wisemen. They packed up their curiosity and deep longings to set off to an unknown destination. They followed the "come-and-see" star to seek for themselves the one whose birth had been announced in the stars and what it might mean. They left their homes to travel beyond intellectual curiosity to an experience of something beyond their current knowing. Through them the birth of Jesus would be carried beyond the Jewish population to the non-Jewish gentiles, so that it would be clear that all peoples everywhere of every kind were invited to "come and see" God in the flesh who lived among us.

"Come and see" Jesus tells Andrew and another disciple when they ask where he was staying. They would spend the day with him and never be the same. Andrew went to his brother, Simon. Come and see. "We have found the Messiah" Andrew said and brought his brother Simon to Jesus. When Simon say himself in Jesus' eyes, Simon Peter's life was changed.

The next day, Jesus found Philip. With yet another variation of "come and see" Jesus says to Philip, "Follow me." After time in Jesus presence, Philip went to Nathanael excited to tell his friend that they had found the Messiah. Nathanael is skeptical. He makes a wisecrack about Nazareth that seems to dismiss the whole idea. Philip doesn't get defensive or angry despite his friend's reaction. Philip doesn't argue or try to persuade him with reason, instead he offers a simply invitation to his doubting, resistant friend, "Come and see." Jesus, who seems to know him, greets Nathanael. You are an Israelite who is not easily fooled or dishonest, Nathanael. Still pushing back, Nathanael challenges Jesus – How do you know me? I saw you before Philip called you. Nathanael came, he saw, and he stayed to see more.

"Come and see" the writer will say to us in countless ways as we read the gospel of John. Jesus finds us where we are and says, "Come and see." Jesus doesn't ask that you first believe in him and have it all figured out before you can come with him. No, Jesus says, come as you are and see. Because Jesus knows that believing is something that happens in the act of following.

Bob wrote, "Now, I personally can relate more to Nathanael than I can to Philip. Over twenty years ago, I too could not see what was in front of me. All I could see were a bunch of church buildings...a conflicted Christian history... and a Jesus painted within the rigid lines of TV Evangelists. "What good could come out of this? "I asked myself. Yet twenty-four years ago, a friend said to me, "come and see." So I did. And the next week, the same friend again said, "Come and see." And so I went with them again and again.

[I was] Asked to attend church every week, until there came a week when my friend couldn't make it to church. And I had to decide for myself. It was a big decision. Now there was not only the voice of my friend gently beckoning, "come and see." There was something that had come alive in me crying out, "Come and see." Come and see what this world cannot give. Come and see what is really true. Come and see a living God."¹ Bob would later become Pastor Bob.

Come and see is at the heart of response to God's gift of baptism. When we bring infants to be baptized, the parents and church make promises:

Will you live with them among God's faithful people, bring them to the word and holy supper, teach them the Lord's Prayer, the Creed and the Ten Commandments, place in their hands the Holy Scriptures, and nurture them in faith and prayer."

That says to me that we bring our children to a faithful church community so that they can "come and see" Jesus in that community, worship, the Bible, Holy Communion, its teachings and traditions. Why? It says in the baptismal liturgy, "so that they may learn to trust God, proclaim Christ through word and deed, care for others and the world God made and work for justice and peace." Once we come and see, once we let Jesus be more than a church or an idea, we stick with Jesus and follow. It's why we implore those who claim boredom, those who rather sleep in, those who are hurt or angry with God to keep coming to worship, to Sunday school to experiences of God's grace and Jesus' ministry. When we "come and see", Jesus has the chance to get into our hearts and lives. Does it always happen that children raised in the church stay in the church? We know the answer is no,

despite the hundreds of teens who promised they would at countless confirmation services. But we still believe that spending time with Jesus is never wasted. God's word will not return empty. Through experiences of God's love and grace, we are gradually transformed to be the people and disciples we were called and empowered to be at the baptismal font. Being those people and disciples makes a difference.

Magi, Andrew, an unnamed disciple with him, Peter, Philip, Nathanael – they all accepted the invitation to come and see. Some more eager or confidently than others. But each took the step onto the road to follow that invitation, to follow Jesus. For us, the road to follow Jesus is to “come and see” in worship, community, scripture, sacrament, teachings and traditions and doing God's work. It is what we have to offer other who are looking for something more, richer, meaningful, holy, life-giving in their lives. Come to church with me and see. It's not the place but the presence of God we ask others to come and see. Come to church and worship, even though worship may seem odd and jolting. Come and see even if you're still working on the God and Jesus thing. Come and see even though you're still not sure about prayer and whether and how it works. Come and see while you sing hymns with lovely words, even though you don't fancy yourself much of a singer and the words are a bit cryptic in your ears. Come and see as you hear or read the Bible, even though it sometimes baffles and discomforts.² Come and see. It's not magic. It's an invitation. What happens next is God's doing. Our job is to walk alongside one another — life-long believer, skeptic, or newbie. To walk alongside one another with our prayers, care, availability and love IS the way we say, with or without words, “come and see... I'll take you to Him.”³ And the Lord says a hardy, “Amen!”

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1/6/18

ENDNOTES

1.. Pastor Bob, "Come and See," January 15, 2012 as posted by John Shore on <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/johnshore/2012/01/come-and-see-a-sermon-by-pastor-bob/>

2.. Adapted from a quote from Michael L. Lindvall, " IT'S 'COME AND SEE,' NOT 'SEE AND COME.'" January 15, 2012 John 1: 35-42, as posted on www.brickchurch.org/Customized/uploads/BrickChurch/Worship/Sermons/PDFs/2012/011512.pdf

3.. Adaption of a quote from David C. McCasland, in his May 10, 2011 devotion on [Our Daily Bread](https://odb.org/2011/05/10/come-and-see/) as posted <https://odb.org/2011/05/10/come-and-see/>