Come and See

John 1:35-42

January 14-15, 2017 (First preached January, 1999) broadly edited

 Good morning! You all look so good today, I feel like I’m underdressed! It is always a joy to be here with you to worship and I am blessed to share this pulpit with Pastor Amy. Let’s begin with a prayer.

 I love you, Lord…

 *Heavenly Father, open my heart and mind today and let your light shine in, cleansing, healing, recovering all that I have lost, saving me and letting me feel your love. Guide my thoughts and my words so that whatever you have to say to each of us might be heard by each heart, embraced by each soul. Transport me today, Lord, to do great things in your name, so that you might be glorified. I pray it in the name of Jesus. Amen.*

 Disciples have been on my mind the last two weeks. Partly, it’s because it’s just after Epiphany, the time of the Christian year when we read the stories of Christ calling the disciples. And partly it’s because, even though I don’t hear it very well, I’m always listening for Christ’s voice in my life and lately I’ve felt as though he has a word for me.

 This morning, I’m inviting you to join me in an exercise. It’s painless, requires no advance preparation, no jumping or running or throwing a ball. You can’t fail or mess up. It will only take a few minutes. When it’s done I’ll ask you some questions. You can answer out loud, or you can answer in your heart. Here’s what I propose. I am going to read a passage of Scripture once through. Then I’m going to read it again. The second time, I’d like you to place yourself in that moment and live it along with its writer. How does that sound? Everyone Ok with that? Alright, here goes. First time through…

*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.*

 *—John 1:35-39 (NRSV)*

 Everyone still Ok? So, with your permission, let me set the stage a bit for the second reading. Allow yourself to enter this Scripture. Let yourself go, relax, open your heart to the leading of the Holy Spirit. Close your eyes. Keep them closed until I ask some questions at the end. If I hear snoring, I’ll stop. It is the first century. You are in Jerusalem. You are standing along the side of a dusty road. It is hot, sunny, dry. You can feel the grit of the dust and dirt in your sandals, on your skin. You are standing in some shade, with several friends who are dressed like you. You can see a few people walking the road, some carrying burdens. You squint against the brightness of the light. You have been waiting for something. Now I pick up the story from Scripture…

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*They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon.*

 Now, keep your eyes closed. Were you able to be present there on that street in Jerusalem? Did you see Jesus? What happened to you in this passage? Where did this passage take you? Are you there now? Did you follow Jesus? If you did, how far did you follow him? Did you go reluctantly or were you excited to find where Jesus was taking you? Do you feel different? Excited, frightened, amazed, anxious, intrigued?

 Open your eyes. How do you feel right now? Ok, hold onto that thought for a moment. I am going to come back to this and I want you to remember what you are feeling. But I’m going to talk awhile first.

Each of us is called to be a disciple of Christ. Some of us have responded to that call. Some of us are considering it. We realize that when we are personally involved, other disciples become more interesting to us. We have an interest in how they came to faith in Christ. We are inspired by their witness and we can watch how Christ led them and loved them. When we see their relationship, we can find something of our own relationship with Jesus in that, and we can gain confidence from it and feel affirmed by it. But more than that, we can act. We can take action based on our faith and trust in Jesus.

You may recall Abraham Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, the motivations that drive our behavior. It starts with Basic Needs like food, water, warmth, rest, and moves to Safety Needs: security and safety. Then Belongingness and Love Needs, Esteem Needs, and finally Self-Actualization Needs like achieving your full potential.

But a hierarchy of needs is not the only thing Maslow is given credit for. He is also credited with having outlined a hierarchy of learning. The hierarchy of learning is like this. There are five stages. The first is **Unconscious Incompetent.** At this stage, “you don’t know what you don’t know and you don’t know you need to know it.” It’s like the child who doesn’t know how to tie its own shoes. Doesn’t know and doesn’t care. Not even aware that shoes are untied. Others take care of all that stuff.

The second stage is that of **Conscious Incompetent.** “I know what I don’t know.” You realize that there is a problem, but you have no clue how to resolve it. The child realizes that shoes are untied, and notes that he or she is having trouble walking around because the shoelaces keep tripping them up, but has no idea how to fix the problem or tie the shoelaces.

The third stage is that of **Conscious Competent**. “I grow and know and it starts to show.” This is the point where you have identified the problem and now you have a basic solution for it. The child has learned how to tie shoes! “Look, Mom and Dad, I can tie my shoes.” It might take a few tries and it may be slow and laborious, requiring a lot of concentration and effort, but the solution to the problem has been found.

The fourth stage is that of **Unconscious Competent**. “I simply go because of what I know.” You see the problem and without thinking, resolve it. The child ties shoes without even thinking about it. Shoe tying is now part of the child’s skill set. Shoe laces comes untied, child reaches down and ties them, and continues to play without interruption.

The fifth stage is **Conscious Competence of Unconscious Incompetence.** In this stage, a “master” can influence others to explore their Unconscious Incompetence. The child, accomplished as a shoe-tier, will see children who are tripping on shoelaces and will show other children how to tie their shoes.

Five stages of learning. In Christian terms, we might say that those who have no connection with God through Jesus Christ are in stage one. They are in la-la land. They have no clue. They are **Unconscious Incompetents.** But then life impacts them in some way and they realize that life is not what they think it should be, but they are not sure why. They become **Conscious Incompetents**. They talk with friends and find a lot of them who are in that same place. Life is not grand, but they can get by. They know they have issues, but they have no idea how to address them. And they have no idea why knowing Jesus might help.

At some point, the issues may become so overwhelming they begin searching for solutions. It often happens when they encounter one of life’s pinch points: a life-threatening health issue, a horrific auto accident, a relationship crisis, the death of someone important to them. They never thought it would happen to them and they don’t know what to do. They have no plan to deal it. But they may sense that there is something “out there” that could help them along the way. That can be a moment of coming toward Jesus. John Wesley calls this “prevenient grace.” They realize there may be a solution out there and Jesus may be part of it.

Armed with a direction to go, they explore the company of other Christians and begin to build a faith. They learn about Jesus and finally surrender their hearts and minds to God’s grace in Jesus Christ. John Wesley calls this “justifying grace.” It is also known as being pardoned, or born again, or born from above, or washed in the blood. The new believer becomes a **Conscious Competent**, knowing and loving Jesus and learning as much as possible about what it means to be a Christian, because they have discovered something out there that is way bigger than themselves and is filled with love and care and it provides a soft place to fall when life becomes overwhelming.

With deeper faith and growth, the believer strives to live a life resembling the life of Jesus. The longer and stronger that desire becomes, the more naturally actions follow. John Wesley calls this the process of “sanctifying grace.” Our lives begin to look more and more like the life of Jesus. We grow, stumble, learn, grow some more, stumble some more, learn some more, but this process continues to draw us closer to God. As we embrace the teachings, life, death, and resurrection of Christ, we become **Unconscious Competents**. Living a life of following Jesus becomes “who we are,” not just what we do. We may not be perfect at it, but it is our identity.

And as this happens, we enter the fifth stage of competency, where we reach out to others who have not yet found Jesus and invite them to the party.

So, the thought I asked you to hold… remember back. Where did it leave you?

 Now, I want to read you the last few sentences of the passage we started above. Listen to the story:

*They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon.*

This is where I stopped. Here’s how it continues…

*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).*

*—John 1:39-42 (NRSV)*

 Andrew, who followed Jesus to where he was staying, and stayed all afternoon, left to find his brother. And what does he say to his brother Simon to pique Simon’s interest and get his attention? Does he say, “Simon, we had the most interesting tour of the village this morning?” or “Simon, we saw the most interesting decorating scheme in this man’s home today?” No. Andrew knows what his brother has been seeking. Simon is a Conscious Incompetent. He knows he is missing something, but he doesn’t know what will fill that hole in his heart. Andrew is at that fifth stage**.** He is the master, leading his brother to the very solution he knows will enrich Simon’s life.He says, “Simon, we’ve found the Messiah!”

Simon had already risen to the level of Conscious Incompetent. He knew he needed something to fill that empty place inside, but he didn’t know what it was. Andrew had discovered the answer. So, he searched out his brother Simon. And without hesitation, Simon came to Jesus and Jesus looked at Simon and, out of his infinite knowledge, said to him, “You are Simon son of John. I name you Peter.”

 Jesus knows that the only way we can embrace him is through the need we have in our own souls. Until we turn from the glitter and glitz of worldly pleasures and offer our hearts to Christ, that empty spot stays empty. To be called by Christ is to acknowledge our need and allow Jesus to fill it. Let me say that again: To be called by Christ is to acknowledge our need and allow Jesus to fill it.

 But these days we spend hardly any time at all looking into our souls to discover what it is we need. We normally look into our wallets or the entertainment section or the restaurant guide or the car dealership or the sports section or Facebook. We are too busy with ball games and work and school and parties and bills and shopping. And we look around from time to time, in the odd moment of reflection, and realize that all that stuff just doesn’t get it. There is still a big hole that we can’t fill up with a good bottle of wine, or a Carnival cruise.

 The problem back in John’s time was that very few people knew what they needed and even fewer looked to God to take care of the problem. Sound familiar? When John wrote his gospel to the first century church, they were beginning to understand that the only thing that stood between them and annihilation by the Romans was God. John wanted it to be very clear that only when they allowed God to become active in their lives did they find a way to live with the persecution and torture and death. It didn’t mean that the persecution and torture and death stopped. It meant that the people could endure it. They could manage to live with it… or die with it. And they would do it with resolution, with acceptance, with defiance, knowing the reward of serving God through any kind of life experience this world chose for them.

 It’s not so different today than it was back in the first century. Not many of us seem to be willing to stand back and look at our lives. We get hypnotized by the routines, the demands, the requirements of living. Very few acknowledge that empty place in our souls. Today, there are lots and lots of Unconscious Incompetents. But just like the people back in John’s day, we need a touch of grace in our lives. We need the promise that things will get better. We need some relief from the struggle and hardship of life.

 It doesn’t come from our jobs, our government, our exercise programs, our entertainment, our sports, or our social media. It comes from the only source of true love in the universe. And it comes in the arms and invitations of those who have committed their lives to embracing that love and grace in the person of Jesus Christ. So often, it is that committed Christian who gives us a hug, or throws an arm around our shoulders, or holds us when we weep, or sits and listens as we pour out our troubles, who suggests the answer to the emptiness and hopelessness we feel.

 When we look at someone who is truly a Christian, we can see the behavior they model, the faith they embrace, and the love they share. And some of us come to want that in our lives, too. And so we seek the Messiah and that Messiah is Jesus Christ. There is only one thing that can fill that void, only one thing that can bring everlasting peace and harmony, only one thing that can help us live in today’s world of suffering— with hope and love… and that is Jesus Christ.

 Andrew and his friend were fortunate because they were standing with John and, as Jesus walked by, John told them that Jesus was the Lamb of God. All they had to do was follow Jesus and they were filled. Each of us today is called to decide which role we will play. If you have found Christ, and you are filled to overflowing with the love of God, as only Christ can do, then you must play the part of John. It is your job to say to others, “Jesus is the Lamb of God. If you are hungry, he’s the Bread of Life. If you are thirsty, he will give you Living Water. Follow Jesus and you will be filled.”

 You must play the part of Andrew and go and fetch your brother or your sister and bring them to Jesus. Tell them the Messiah is here. Introduce them to Jesus. And I promise you, Jesus will recognize them.

 And if you haven’t found that nourishment, if you are still looking to other things for a momentary fix to get you through the next dreary day, then right now, let me introduce you to Jesus. He is the Lamb of God. He has been sent to us as an extraordinary gift. If you let him lead your life, guide your decisions, and shower you with blessings, the vacant place in your soul will be filled with love. All your aches and hurts and wounds will be tended and healed. Your broken places will be repaired. And you will experience a joy and freedom and peace beyond your imagination. Today, it is your turn to walk down the street with Jesus. And when he stops and asks, “What are you looking for,” it is your turn to recognize him as your master. And today, it is your turn to hear Jesus say to you, “Come and see.”

 You have heard the saying, *Carpe diem*, “Seize the day!” Let me offer you another one: *Carpe eternatu*, “Why settle for a day! Sieze eternity!” Come and see.

Pray with me:

 *Heavenly Father, maybe it’s time for me to reflect on the life I lead. I know what you want me to do, but it’s so hard to do it. I know I hardly give you anything. I don’t talk to you enough, I don’t listen for your guidance enough, I don’t serve my church family enough, I am miserly with my money, except when it comes to spending it on myself and my family. I don’t talk to anyone about you. As a Christian, I am pretty much a failure. Even though I fall short in so many ways, please forgive me.*

 *But I do know that you sent Jesus for me, especially because I am such a failure. And Jesus says you love me and want me to share your glory. He says that you are always inviting me to come and see. So, today, I’m going to accept that invitation.*

 *Lord, even though I don’t deserve it, please forgive me for doing so little to help others and to worship you. I’m so sorry. Please help me get good at it. Jesus, keep your advice, your stories, and your courage in my heart and my mind as I go through each day, so I can begin to imitate you. Give me the will to pick up and read my Bible. Make me sensitive to the needs of those around me and give me the will to tell them about you and invite them to come and see.*

 *Give me heaven on this earth and I will do my part to make this earth into heaven until you come back to complete your kingdom. I hear you calling me today. I want to come and see. So fill my heart right now with your love and grace.*

 *In Jesus’ name I ask it. Amen.*