

Come and See and Stay

John 1:35-51

John Breon

We've seen John the Baptist declare who Jesus is. He's the Lamb of God who takes away sin. He's one who has existed from eternity past. He's the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit—he plunges us into the very life of God. Jesus is the Son of God. As some of John's followers begin to follow Jesus, we'll see that he is also the Teacher and the Messiah, God's chosen and anointed leader. He's the one Moses and the prophets wrote about—he fulfills God's purposes and promises. He's the King of Israel. And he's the Son of Man who shows us the glory of God.

Let's see some ways people become disciples, followers, apprentices of Jesus and grow in their relationship with him.

John the Baptist had disciples—students who listened to and lived by his preaching and teaching. The next day after John had first announced that Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away sin, two of his disciples are with John when Jesus passes by again. And again John says, "Look, the Lamb of God!" As these disciples hear John's witness to Jesus, they begin to follow Jesus. John is fulfilling his purpose of being a witness to the light, so that all might believe through him (1:7). John turns his disciples over to Jesus happily. He knows, "He must increase but I must decrease" (3:30).

These two disciples of John start following Jesus. Their following isn't the end of the story, but just the beginning. They're curious about Jesus. They want to know more about him. They want to get to know him. Our first step toward discipleship is when we hear about Jesus and we realize we're interested in him. We want to know more and so we begin seeking and searching and asking and learning. Sometimes, I think we take being interested in Jesus to be the same as being committed to Jesus. But there's much more for us than just being interested and beginning to seek.

Jesus initiates the conversation. He turns and sees these two men following him and he says, "What do you want?" On the surface that's a pretty simple question. But it also has the deeper meaning, "What are you looking for or searching for?" The first words of Jesus in this Gospel are a

question that he addresses to everyone who would follow him: "What are you looking for?" What do you really seek? Whether we know it or not, this question touches on our basic need that leads us to seek and turn to God. Whether we're aware, all our seeking and searching is really a reaching to God because God is reaching to us, searching for us, seeking us. All of our longings and desires are echoes or reflections of that basic longing for God, to be with God, to stay with God. That's what we're made for. Remember Augustine's prayer, "You have made us for yourself and our hearts are restless until they rest in you" (*Confessions*).

These two disciples aren't aware of all that when Jesus asks, "What are you looking for?" They simply reply, "Teacher, where are you staying?" In one way it seems they're avoiding Jesus' question.

But let's give them a little more credit than that. They've already begun following Jesus. That's what disciples do—follow. If we hear Jesus' question at the deeper level—"what are you really seeking?"—we can hear the disciples' response at a deeper level as well. The word "stay" is important in John's Gospel, especially when it means "dwell" or "abide." Perhaps these disciples are asking how they can remain or abide with Jesus. That's another key part of being a disciple of Jesus.

He answers with an invitation, "Come and see." Again, look below the surface of just, "Come on over to the house." All through this Gospel, to come to Jesus is to believe in him. To see Jesus with perception is to have faith in him. God gives eternal life to those who come to Jesus (5:40), see him or look on him (6:40) and believe in him (6:47). Those are three different ways of describing the same action. "If the training of the disciples begins when they *go* to Jesus to *see* where he is staying and *stay* on with him, it will be completed when they *see* his glory and *believe* in him (2:11)" (Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John, Anchor Bible*).

Michael Card is a Bible teacher who puts a lot of his insights into music. He's recorded many songs about the life of Jesus. He's actually recorded an album about each of the four Gospels. The one on John is called *A Misunderstood Messiah*. There's a song on it called "Come and See." It starts with this passage in chapter one, but it includes ideas from the whole Gospel and it even introduces us to the Gospel writer.

Come and see, come follow me
Back to the place where He's staying
And He'll not mind, for there you will find
All that your faith has been waiting [for]

Come and see, come follow me
To a road where believing is seeing
There's work to do and words of truth
To find in your heart for the speaking
Come and see, Come and see...

Come see the Way, the Truth and the Life
Come see the Light that is living
Come now and see how the Truth sets you free
Come and live the life He is giving
Come and see, Come and see...

Come and see, come follow me
To a garden He's watered with weeping
Though shadows cling the angels will sing
Of the promise He's painfully keeping
Come and see, Come and see...

Come see the Servant who's also a King
See on the cross He is reeling
He will provide from the wound in His side
Water and blood for our healing

Come see the Way, the Truth and the Life
Come see the Light that is living
Come now and see how the Truth sets you free
Come and live the life He is giving
Come and see, Come and see...

Come and see, come follow me
To the writer of parable pages
That fiery child, so angry and wild
Now is ink-fingered and aged
Come and see, Come and see...

The two disciples do come with Jesus and see where he's staying and they *remain* with him that day. They stayed with Jesus for a day, and, as it turned out, stayed with him for the rest of their lives. "Disciples are those who want to stay with Jesus, wherever that stay may be and wherever it may take them" (*Homiletics*, January 2002, 26).

Where does following Jesus take us? Where has following Jesus taken you? Where are we called to stay with Jesus? We might think we'd get to stay with Jesus in a 5-Star hotel, but then we remember the stable where Jesus was born. We hear again his words, "The Son of Man has no place to lay his head."

In April 1963, Martin Luther King, Jr. followed Jesus and "stayed" with Jesus in the Birmingham jail. That's when he wrote one of the most significant Christian documents of the civil rights movement: his "Letter from Birmingham Jail."

Following Jesus and staying with him may put us in uncomfortable and lonely places. But Jesus won't let us ignore peace and justice. He won't let us avoid doing what's right and taking a stand for righteousness.

Those early disciples learned this the longer they were with Jesus. They also learned that after starting with Jesus, beginning to follow him, staying with him and getting to know him, the next step is bringing others to Jesus.

We finally learn the name of one of these disciples. *Andrew* went to his brother Simon and told him, "We have found the Messiah"—the long-expected one, the one we have heard of and hoped for all our lives. Then Andrew brought his brother Simon to Jesus. Jesus showed that he knew Simon, knew his heart and his character. Jesus also began to share some of his dream for who Simon would become. He gave Simon the name Cephas or Peter. Jesus changed Simon's name to "Rocky."

In the very next scene, Jesus calls Philip to follow him. Philip goes to his friend Nathanael and tells him about Jesus. When Nathanael asks, "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" Philip says, "Come and see."

My brother Steve is a United Methodist pastor in Kansas City. He goes to the Y to work out most days. One day there he noticed a man he had seen before, but had never spoken to. The man was looking at Steve and finally said, "Are you a pastor?" Steve told him that he was. The man said, "You look like a pastor." I'm not sure what that means. It reminds me of the old joke where someone asks a man if he's a pastor and he says, "No, I'm not a pastor; I've just been ill for a few days." Well, when the man told my brother he looked like a pastor, Steve said, "I don't get that much." The man said it was a compliment. Steve asked him where he lived and if he went to church. The man said no. Steve asked, "What do you do on Christmas?" "Nothing." So he invited him to come to a Christmas Eve service. The man ended the conversation with, "I need some guidance."

That's not a dramatic conversion story, but it's a "come and see" story. After hearing the story, a woman in Steve's church was moved to invite a co-worker to a Christmas Eve service. This doesn't have to be big and dramatic. We just have to be willing to talk with people and mostly listen to them and take a chance on inviting them to check out the church or check out faith.

Philip has met Jesus and become convinced that Jesus is the Messiah. He shares this discovery with Nathanael. But when Nathanael hears that "the Messiah" is from Nazareth, he reacts with disparaging doubt—a reaction that Jesus will encounter often. Nathanael says, "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" I've always viewed this question about Nazareth as an example of local rivalry. Nathanael is from Cana in Galilee and Nazareth is a small town not too far away. It's kind of like someone from Durant or Caddo saying, "_____! [You pick a town] Can anything good come from there?"

But I think there may have been more going on in Nathanael's question about Nazareth. Nazareth was a small and insignificant town. I remember one time when I was very young, my parents and I were going into a store in my hometown. Two people from out-of-town were leaving

the store to get into their car. We overheard one say to the other, "This is such a hick town." Nathanael would say that about Nazareth, but he might also say it about the whole region, including his own town of Cana. He can't imagine that anyone as important as the Messiah could come from where he lives. He refuses to see glory or greatness in anything familiar or close to home. He's blind to the glory of what's near.

Maybe Nathanael is showing low regard for himself and where he's from when he expresses disbelief that the Messiah could be from Nazareth. Jesus' being from Nazareth is like his birth in a stable—it's part of the offense of the incarnation.

Philip doesn't argue with Nathanael or try to change his attitude. He simply says, "Come and see." And Nathanael shows a generous heart and an open mind as he goes with Philip to see Jesus.

As they approach Jesus, he says about Nathanael, "Here is a true Israelite who has no deceit in him!" Here's a man who's all Israel and no Jacob. He's a true son of Israel, a true representative of the people of God.

That had to make Nathanael feel good. But he's puzzled. He's never met this Jesus before. So he asks, "How do you know me?"

And Jesus says, "I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you." And that amazes Nathanael. Like one of the old prophets, Jesus knows what happens beyond his immediate location. There's no way, naturally, he could have seen Nathanael sitting under that fig tree or known anything about him. But he did know where Nathanael had been and he did know his character—or at least he declared the kind of person that he saw Nathanael could become. It turns out there is something special about Jesus, even if he is from Nazareth.

Just a little while earlier Nathanael had said about Jesus, "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" Now he declares to Jesus, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" In this context, Son of God and King of Israel mean the same thing. They're ways of describing the Messiah.

Jesus' answer is great. He seems kind of amused by this. Basically, he says, "I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You think that's something? Listen, you ain't seen nothing yet!" He tells this little group of disciples,

“You will see greater things than this. In fact, and this is the truth: You will see heaven opened and *the angels of God ascending and descending* upon the Son of Man.”

I like to imagine that Nathanael loved the story of Jacob’s ladder and longed for Jacob’s dream to come true for him. But what Jesus said was different. In Jacob’s dream, the angels were ascending and descending on the ladder. Jesus says that the disciples would see the angels ascending and descending on the Son of Man. “Son of Man” is how Jesus often refers to himself. When Jacob awoke from his dream, he said, “Surely the Lord is in this place and I didn’t know it. How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven” (Gen 28:16, 17).

Jesus is saying that he is what Jacob dreamed about. Jacob experienced a point of contact between heaven and earth. Jesus is the point of contact between heaven and earth. Jesus told Nathanael and the others that they would see heaven opened. That’s like what happened at Jesus’ baptism: The sky opened, God spoke and the Holy Spirit came down upon Jesus. Jesus takes the place of Jacob’s ladder. He’s the dwelling of God among us. He’s the gate of God’s realm. He’s the presence of the Lord. He’s the way for the “traffic” that brings heaven’s blessing to people.

Jesus’ disciples would get to see these greater things. They would see God’s glory in Jesus as they came to know him better and put their faith in him.

What does this mean for us? Jesus continues to be the point of contact between heaven and earth. When we know him, we’re connected to the reality of God, God’s kingdom, and all the blessings of forgiveness, salvation, and life that God offers.

Jesus continues to bring the presence of God into the reality of our lives, of our world. He fulfills Jacob’s dream and Nathanael’s longing and all of our deepest desires to know God, to know meaning, to find fullness for our emptiness and glory in our darkness.

Is there someone in your family or among your friends who needs a life-changing encounter with Jesus? Are there people we know with whom we can share the invitation “come and see”? If we’re disciples of Jesus, we

need to help others come to him and start following him for themselves. And if we really love people, we'll want them to find what we've found in Jesus, to experience the love and grace and peace and purpose and meaning and adventure of following Jesus and staying with him.

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Come see the Light that is living
Come now and see how the Truth sets you free
Come and live the life He is giving
Come and see, Come and see...