

Come and See  
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January 15, 2022 – Epiphany 2A  
John 1:29-42

When my cousins and I were kids, we spent a lot of time hanging out and playing in the kitchen at our grandparents' house. Inevitably, our grandmother would get up from her seat at the table and go into the pantry just off the main part of the kitchen to find something. And almost inevitably, one of us kids would follow her. Now, the catch was, she was under five feet tall, and the whole pantry was built to accommodate her. She also wasn't always aware there was a kid behind her, and there came a point for nearly all of us when she'd open a cabinet unawares and catch whoever was shadowing her with the corner of the door. She'd apologize to the offended party profusely, and then ask what they wanted. *You're thirsty? Here's a cup, there's some Kool Aid and soda in the fridge, go pour yourself some. Are you hungry? There's some cookies up here, or we can slice up some fresh veggies from the garden for you. Oh, wait. Let's go look in the big freezer down cellar. I'm sure there's some zucchini bread or ice cream in there. Let's bring some up for everyone.* Even if what we received wasn't what we thought we wanted to begin with when we went into that pantry, our curiosity never went unrewarded. And, at least for me and a few of the cousins, we learned to treat every kitchen as a place of endless wonder.

In today's Gospel passage, we are presented with a similar picture, where a couple of seemingly random people start following Jesus around after they learn that he's not just another rabbi wandering through the town. His response to them was a lot like my grandmother's: *what do you want?* What he actually says has subtle layers of meaning which don't come across that well in translation. What the New Revised

Standard Version renders as, "What are you looking for?" – *Ti zeteite* – can also mean "What do you want?" or "What are you trying?" or "What do you expect?" Adding these other layers of meaning effectively has Jesus giving these two disciples an "out". They could say they thought Jesus was someone else, or they could repeat back to him what they'd heard John the Baptizer say – both of which would likely have resulted in a long lecture. What they ultimately choose to do is yet a third option, which is to allow the truth that they'd heard push them into action.

The narrator doesn't tell us why these two start following Jesus around as they do, or even what they do to prompt Jesus to ask them what they want. Regardless of how they manage to get his attention, his response is a bit of a jolt. But, they don't seem fazed at all. Instead, they call him Rabbi – Teacher – and ask him where he's staying. This recognition is one of the first signs that Jesus is something really special. Likewise the people who believe what they see and hear where he's concerned, especially at this early point in the narrative, before he's done or taught much in public, are special. They don't respect him just because he's a rabbi. They genuinely want to learn from him, and are open to the kind of life-changing stuff that comes along with sitting at his feet.

This initial encounter between Jesus and some would-be disciples is a key piece of how John's Gospel sets us up for understanding what God is up to in the world through the person of Jesus Christ. This setup comprises the entire first chapter. After the first 18 verses of the Prologue, we're introduced to John the Baptizer, the authority figures who don't like what they see, some disciples, and eventually Jesus himself over the course of a few days. It has two essential points readers will need to remember as they go forward through the rest of the gospel. The first, as the Prologue outlines so

beautifully, is that God has brought the divine life into the world in the person of the so-called Word made flesh, who lived among us and whose glory – as of the Father's only Son – we have seen, full of grace and truth.

The second is that John the Baptizer is the principal witness to this glory. He's the one who tells everyone within earshot who Jesus is: the Lamb of God who is come to conquer the sin of the world; the one who will baptize not with water but with the Holy Spirit; God's anointed one, or messiah; and the Son of God.

It's a lot to take in – so much so that theologians were using this text as justification in literally fighting over the question of whether Jesus was God, or merely LIKE God (which amounts to a single letter in Greek!) for centuries after John's description of these events was recorded. Regardless, in the present timeframe of the story, the one anonymous disciple, Andrew, and Simon, to be named Rocky, or Peter, are able to take in at least enough of the truths it contains to respond to the invitation to come and see.

It's their response that matters most. As one commenter on this text notes, "On the surface this might appear to be a disjointed conversation. Jesus asks a question that could be taken a myriad of ways and the disciples' response is a question that is, on the surface, not in any way related to Jesus' question. However, when one understands that Rabbi means teacher (which the evangelist kindly spells out), then it becomes a bit more obvious what the disciples mean; they want to learn from Jesus.

"Jesus invites them to 'come and see,' an invitation that Jesus will make in various ways to many people throughout the Gospel. As a rabbi, a teacher, Jesus does

not just speak (although he certainly does plenty of that in John), he invites disciples into participation."<sup>1</sup>

What exactly are they being invited to participate in?

When Jesus calls Philip and Nathanael to join him in the final episode of this chapter, all he tells them is that they will see "greater things than these." If we read through the rest of the gospel, we'll find that these "greater things" include human participation in the very life of God. Within the gospel's framework, the pathway to getting there is as simple as accepting the call to come and see. Come, see the signs that Jesus does, and believe he is the true light that has come into the world.

This idea of invitation remains an essential piece of practicing the faith we confess. That we also say "come and see!" to anyone who's curious about what our little community has to offer is the beginning of how we continue to grow and change. What we think we're inviting others to experience, however, may not always be perceived as what we think it is. The idea of "Church" is a tough sell. Too often, the idea brings up only the negative aspects, starting with how many Christian communities do the exact opposite of what they say they believe, and ending with a stereotype of "Christian" which has become synonymous with bigotry, hatred, and an unwillingness to think critically about the Bible and the world around us. The only way to counter those stereotypes is not to be them – and then to invite others to come and experience it for themselves. Hopefully the end result for invitees will be like opening up my

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<sup>1</sup> Jillian Engelhardt, "Commentary on John 1:29-42." <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/reviced-common-lectionary/second-sunday-after-epiphany/commentary-on-john-129-42-6> [accessed January 9, 2023].

grandmother's freezer. We never knew quite what we'd find there, but we trusted that not only would it taste good once thawed, but that it was offered up only out of love.