

John 1:35-51 – The Christ who calls: “Come and See”

One of the things I often hear from my grandchildren is, “Come and see, Grampy”: Come and see the picture I’ve drawn; come and see the tower I’ve built with Lego; come and see the ladybird I have made from a stone collected from the beach. They are not content simply to tell me about these things, they want me to come and see for myself what they have done – to appreciate and admire it, and to express my appreciation.

This same theme runs through the Bible passage we have read together; “Come and see”. I want to take you through this passage in which John describes the calling of Jesus’ first disciples and I then want us to think about how Jesus is addressing us through these verses.

Andrew and Simon – John 1:35-42

John the Baptist had his own group of disciples. They were those who had heard his preaching, been baptised by him, and who had joined him in looking forward to the coming of the one of whom John preached. They remained with John to listen to his teaching and learn more from him.

With great reluctance John had baptised Jesus. Now, a few days later, he saw Jesus walking by the Jordan just a little way from where he was preaching and baptising. He pointed Jesus to his disciples, as he had done before, saying “Look, the Lamb of God (who takes away the sin of the world)”. Two of John’s disciples, hearing how John described Jesus, set off to follow Jesus and catch him up. As they approached him, Jesus turned round and challenged them, “What do you want?”

In response, they hardly know what to say to Jesus. But they do know this, they want to be with Jesus. So they ask him the question, “Rabbi / Teacher, where are you staying?” We want to be where you are. We want to sit at your feet and to learn of you.

And Jesus replies, “Come and See”. He invites them to come with him and to spend time with him. He invites them to dwell with him and to get to know him and to discover for themselves who he is. “Come and see.”

And that’s just what they do.

We next learn that one of these two was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. He not only came and spent time with Jesus, he clearly did see. He saw something of who Jesus is – the promised Messiah, the one in whom and through whom all the promises of Scripture are fulfilled.

Andrew could hardly wait to tell his brother what he had discovered: “We have found the Messiah”. And with these words he brought his brother, Simon, to Jesus. “You must come and see for yourself. It’s not enough for me just to tell you about this man, you must come and meet him. Come and see.

And Simon came to see and know Jesus and received from him the new name, Peter.

Philip and Nathaniel – John 1:43-51

The next day Jesus left the area of the Jordan, the area where John was baptising, and went to Bethsaida in Galilee. This was the area where Andrew and Peter came from.

Here, Jesus came across a man called Philip. Jesus invited him to join his little band with the words, “Follow me”. Jesus was inviting Philip also to come and spend time with him, to learn from him and to see and understand for himself who he is.

Immediately Philip went and found his friend Nathaniel. Listen to what he says, “We have found the one Moses wrote about in the law, and about whom the prophets also wrote – Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.” By spending time with this man, he is saying, we have discovered that he is the Promised One in whom all the Scriptures find their fulfilment; he is the focus of all the promises and purposes of God.

Now Nathaniel is a man who takes his faith and the Scriptures very seriously. He is a man of great integrity whom Jesus will describe as “a true Israelite in which there is nothing false.” But he treats

Philip's words with great suspicion – perhaps even scorn. He knows the Scriptures and all that God has promised to do for and through his people. How can this man from Nazareth be the one through whom God will fulfil such great promises? "Nazareth!", he says, "Can anything good come from there?"

Philip replies with the simple invitation, "Come and see", echoing the words Jesus had earlier spoken to Andrew. Philip does not try to have an argument with Nathaniel; he does not try to convince him of the truth of what he has announced to him; he simply invites him to come and find out for himself. "Come and see". Spend time with this man; get to know him and find out for yourself.

So saying, Andrew leads Nathaniel to Jesus.

And Nathaniel does see. He sees that Jesus knows all about him; knows not only where he had been before Philip found him, but knows the very character of his heart. He sees that Jesus is indeed, "the Son of God, the King of Israel". He is all that Philip said of him, he is the promised Messiah, the Christ. No longer is this something he had simply heard from someone else and viewed with suspicion, he had come to see for himself who Jesus is.

And here, you might think, the story might end. But no, Jesus tells Nathaniel that he has a lot more to see, a lot more that he needs to understand. Jesus is saying, "You think that I am the Messiah? That's good. But what does that really mean. Who is this Messiah? What has he come to do? You need to see more of who I am; you will see greater things ... You will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

What strange words. What did Jesus mean?

Nathaniel was a man who knew his Scriptures and would immediately have recognised this picture. It is a reference to Jacob's dream recorded in Genesis 28. Having cheated his brother Esau out of his inheritance and blessing, Jacob had to flee for his life.

On that first night away from home, he lay down to an uncomfortable night's sleep in the open countryside. No doubt he feared he had lost everything – his family, his home and the promised inheritance. But in the night he had a dream. He saw heaven opened and a ladder or stairway extending from heaven down to earth. And he saw angels ascending and descending on it.

And he saw more. He saw something of the glory of the Lord God appearing in the opened heavens. And he heard God speak to him, promising to be with him in his exile and to bring him safely back to his home and his inheritance. Despite all that Jacob had done, his lying and cheating, God remains faithful to his purposes and promises. He is determined to bless Jacob, and through him fulfil all that he had promised to Abraham.

When Jacob woke up he called the place "Bethel" – it is the house of God, the gateway between heaven and earth – the place where heaven and earth meet.

And Jesus applies this picture to himself – "I tell you the truth, you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man." He is saying that he is the one who creates a path between earth and heaven. He is the one in whom heaven is opened and God comes to be present with us. He is the one in whom the glory of God has appeared in all its fullness. He is the one in whom and through whom God has spoken his final word – "This is my Son whom I love. Hear him". This is the one through whom God will fulfil all the covenant promises made to Abraham, for it is in him, in Jesus, that all nations shall be blessed.

I wonder what Nathaniel made of that?

How does this passage address us today?

But even more important, what do we make of it? How does this passage speak to us today?

There is much talk today of "thin places", places where the barrier between heaven and earth seems almost to disappear. And maybe in your own experience, in a certain place or at a particular time, it seemed to you that heaven could almost be touched.

But here is the ultimate "thin place". Jesus is the one in whom heaven has been opened and God has come down and revealed himself to us. And he is the stairway into an opened heaven for he

brings us into the very presence of God, unworthy, like Jacob, though we are. For he is “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” By his death upon the cross as our sacrificial Lamb, he reconciles us to God. As one hymn writer of bygone days expressed it:

Beneath the cross of Jesus I fain would take my stand,
The shadow of a mighty rock within a weary land;
A home within the wilderness, a rest upon the way,
From the burning of the noontide heat, and the burden of the day.

O safe and happy shelter, O refuge tried and sweet,
O trysting place where Heaven’s love and Heaven’s justice meet!
As to the holy patriarch that wondrous dream was given,
So seems my Saviour’s cross to me, a ladder up to heaven.

Jesus addresses us today in the same way as he addressed Andrew and Peter, Philip and Nathaniel.

He addresses those who are keen to know him but equally he addresses those who are sceptical and dismissive with the same gracious words of invitation, “Come and see”. He has not come to crush us with his power and authority or to scold us for our lack of faith or little faith. He invites us to come; to come and see for ourselves who he is. To come and learn of him and discover more of the blessings of God that are to be found in him – blessings of forgiveness and acceptance, the blessing of knowing God.

And this is a continual call, a lifelong call. No matter how many years, or few, we have known Christ, he calls us still to “Come and see” – to discover more of his grace and goodness; to see more of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ; to grow in love for him and in likeness to him.

And no matter what we may have done or failed to do this week, he continually invites us to come to him and find rest for our souls in him.

There is no one else like Jesus, no other way into the presence of God. And he continually invites us with the word “Come.”

And as we come to Jesus, as we learn of him and follow him, we are moved to extend this same invitation to others – friends whom we want to discover in Jesus Christ all that we have discovered; those who feel lost and hurt and who are seeking for someone to help them and heal them; but equally those who are cynical and dismissive towards the claims of Christ. To all he says, “Come.” And to all we can say “Come and see”. Discover for yourself something of who this man was and is. Come, see the one in whom heaven has been opened and the glory of the Living God has appeared. Come and listen to his words and hear how he addresses you and calls to you. Come and see.

This morning we have watched a video clip of the work of Mercy Ships. Through their compassion and sacrificial service they are enabling people to come and see and *taste* something of the mercy and compassion of God. They are not just telling people about Christ, they are inviting people to come and see – come and learn by experience – something of him.

Sometimes we want to make things so complicated. We feel that we need to argue with others and convince them of the truth. Then we feel that we are not clever enough and their arguments may defeat us, and so we lose heart and give up. Let’s stop arguing and rather invite others to “Come and see” for themselves and decide for themselves. They will be convinced not by our arguments but by an encounter with the risen Christ.

“Come and see.” This is the call of Jesus to us and this is the call that we can issue to others around us.

Open our eyes Lord to see more of your love in the Lord Jesus and to rejoice in all that we discover in him. Help us to be those who encourage others to come and see something of your glory, grace, goodness and mercy in the Lord Jesus. For his name’s sake.