

My brothers and sisters in Christ, let us pray. God of our Christmas hopes and aspirations, may the words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts always be acceptable in Your sight, Our strength and our redeemer, Amen.

In the second half of our text today, John the Baptist witnesses to his two disciples when he says, “see, there’s the guy I’ve been talking about!” and they get all excited and follow Jesus. One of them, Andrew, goes and gets his brother Peter. Then just after this, Jesus finds Philip, but then Philip finds Nathanael and tells him all about Jesus in really excited terms... “This is the one! The one that everyone from Moses on down has been waiting for, the one we have heard about in the synagogues and the scriptures! Hurry, come see this Jesus guy, he’s the real deal!”

Generally, in the Gospels, a witness is needed to help others "see" Jesus. In fact, these two events may also indicate that one cannot adequately follow Jesus without also extending the invitation to others. It’s just not possible for these guys who have “come and seen” not to want to invite others, too. Ever have that

happen? Where something is just soooooo cool that we have to have our friends see it also? And what ends up happening? We both end up liking who or what it is we're all excited about and maybe even go back and see them again and again. Like rock groups only better. This is God, after all, and every time we see something bigger and more amazing because God is like that, bigger than us and anything we can imagine. Sooo cool. The bottom line is action...we talk about not just thinking stuff but doing stuff, right(?)...is that we tell others what we have seen and heard and believe and then to invite them to "come and see."

So back to our text. The invitation, to "Come and see," is given twice in our scripture(1:39, 46). In the Gospel of John, faith begins by responding to the invitation to "come and see." The same words are later said in Chapter 4 by the Samaritan woman to the people, "**Come and see** a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?"

The same combination of words is used at the end of the gospel: Mary **comes and sees** that the stone has been removed from the tomb (20:1). Peter and the

other disciple come to the tomb and look in and see. The one sees and believes. Whenever we see and experience something wonderful, it's hard to unsee it. So we have little choice but to believe it's that cool. And we want more of it.

Our bridge initiative is something that we all rock with, not only because it's true and right, but the fact that the kids often break through all our theological barriers and teach us cool stuff. It's more than just a do-nice thing for other people. The bridge says that things are different when we live with hearts that love first rather than question or judge first. Let's look at the wall here, there's a bunch of figures on the one side and over on the other, someone who might have some questions, or is unsure, or just doesn't want anyone to get too close. And there is a group that says, "it's OK to be unsure, questioning, or scared. But come and see."

The very heart of our ministry, right here, right now, is all about that statement, "Come and See".

What will people "come and see" in our congregations? Will they see that we are Jesus' disciples by the way we love one another as Christ has loved us?

Will they see that we have heard Jesus' word so that his joy is in us and our joy is complete (15:11)? Will they see us pointing to ourselves, our own achievements and hard work or will they see us being proper symbols and witnesses, pointing to God and Christ's mission in the world? Will they see us as folks just like them, imperfect and trying their best in a world that beats them up day after day, but still joy and love-filled because of God's love in our lives and for one another?

It was Jesus who turned and first spoke to the two disciples of John who were following him (1:38). It is Jesus who speaks first to Simon (1:42). It is Jesus who finds Philip and speaks to him (1:43). Nathanael didn't find Jesus. Jesus found him! God is constantly seeking us out, but we must have ears that can hear and eyes that can see to recognize what's happening.

I have two fears for the future of the Christian church. One is that we will fail to be witnesses -- people willing to invite others to "come and see". I am becoming more and more convinced that invitationalness needs to be part of faith. One of the differences that faith should make in our lives is the desire that

others -- especially those without a religious faith -- might also share in and benefit from the relationship God offers. If we are not willing to invite others into this experience, what does that say about our experiences learned through the teachings of Christ? If we are not willing to invite others to our congregations -- to worship services and other activities, what does that say about our experiences in our congregations?

We tell friends and neighbors all the time about good restaurants, hair salons, fitness clubs, play places, and all other manner of shopping for bargains. So we're not afraid to tell people about cool stuff we see or has happened to us. I remember a fella in San Diego who once invited me for breakfast meetings of a group of philanthropists who did nice things, the Rortary club. I went a couple times. He then started asking if I would like to join. (I understand that there is a prize for the member who recruits the most new members during the year.) And I did for a time, until I moved away.

Why don't we have the same fervor over inviting and encouraging people to come and participate in our church activities? Let me suggest that there are three

broad areas that are likely to influence our non-inviting-ness.

First, culture says you don't talk about politics or religion if you want friends. And maybe we're shy talking to others, sure, but count up the number of people you deal with weekly who you don't know well, and it's pretty clear that we're not afraid to talk to others. Why not about God? Second, maybe religion is a private matter. Did Jesus say that? God is made to be shared, because God is love, and love is not very useful unless it's shared with someone else. How do we share God with someone else unless we talk about God's role in our lives and how we rock every day? Third, and most disturbing, is that maybe we don't feel we have a personal faith to share. We come here like we have for years, but we never ask ourselves 'What do I believe, and why? Why do I attend worship, and why invite others to come see what's happening at church?'

I've tried to give some answers to these questions, but it's not enough. We need to challenge each other's assumptions about these things and answer them ourselves if we want to not just survive, but thrive. We

don't have to wait for a magic formula. We have to ask others to simply 'Come and See'. Or maybe it isn't worth it? Do we believe THAT? No. Come and See demands that we be open to new things, new people, to put down our nets and try something different. That can be daunting, for sure.

I'll leave you with these final thoughts. The world is changing. We want to respect our long-time heritage and membership but also begin to turn to community resources, participation, and doing stuff that matters to people outside the church. We began that commitment in calling me some 5 ½ years ago, and it continues today to be a church that opens its doors to doing what we're called to do to meet God's mission to the people, not what we want to do to prove our mettle that we're just faithful enough through song and sermon and prayer. Meeting God's mission is what Jesus meant when he said "Come and see". And it's when belief happened when they came and saw the empty tomb.

Have we made the challenge in our hearts? Are we all the Bridge that we have promised to be? Come, and see. Others, but us, too. Thanks be to God, Amen.