



Come and See

Vienna Presbyterian Church
The Rev. Dr. Peter G. James
John 1:43-51

November 13, 2016



There's a considerable amount of angst in our country right now. Some of you are delighted and satisfied with the election results; others of you are disappointed, concerned and

perhaps even afraid. Regardless of how you voted, there's plenty of anxiety about America's future at the moment.

As much as this election means to us, I want everybody to take a deep breath and reset on what is core to us as Christians. God is still on the throne. We trust in God's providential care over all nations and people. While kingdoms rise and fall, the Word of our Lord endures forever. Our future is secure because this world belongs to God. We do not have messianic expectations for our elected leaders. Our ultimate allegiance belongs to Jesus Christ as Messiah and Lord.

This fall, we're focusing on renewal; Souls on Fire for God, we're calling it. We've talked about souls on fire for mission and generosity. Now, our emphasis is souls on fire for sharing our faith.

I can't think of a better time to talk about sharing our faith. Our country has been rocked by a divisive election. Democracy is built upon the premise that everyone brings to the table what they value and believe. It's a momentous time for Christians to stand up and be counted. Given the contentious election just concluded, it's critical for us to dial back the rhetoric and speak what we believe with civility and respect.

Sharing our faith, what we call witnessing, is not unique to Christians. Everyone witnesses to what they enjoy. If you

enjoy remodeling, you talk home improvements with people. If you enjoy good food, you talk fine cuisine with friends. If you enjoy music, you talk about your favorite musicians. If you enjoy the Redskins or the Cubs, you talk about your favorite sports team. Everyone witnesses to what they enjoy. The goal of this sermon is to explore ways to talk about faith that are credible and winsome.

Today's Scripture lesson is a virtual tutorial on sharing faith with people. John tells us that Jesus leaves for Galilee to find Philip (1:43). John's language gives the distinct impression that Jesus intentionally goes looking for Philip.

Jesus locates Philip and says, "Follow me." While we don't know if this is the entirety of what Jesus says to Philip, evidently it's all it takes for Philip to



become one of Jesus' followers. Phillip's first act as a follower of Jesus is to invite a friend to follow Jesus with him. This same pattern occurs in the previous story in John's gospel. Andrew's first act in following Jesus is to invite his brother Peter to join Jesus also.

Philip finds Nathanael sitting under a fig tree. "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law and about whom the Prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, son of Joseph" (1:45). The phrase "Law and the Prophets" is another way of referring to the Old Testament. Philip is convinced everything written in the Law and proclaimed by the prophets is fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth.

Nathanael jumps all over Philip's reference to "Jesus of Nazareth." "Nazareth!" he exclaims, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Nazareth was a really small town in Jesus' day. We're talking 400 people soaking wet. It's so insignificant that Nazareth is never once mentioned in the Old Testament. Nathanael hails from a neighboring town called Cana. Nazareth and Cana are rival small towns. I bet their high schools were arch rivals also. I know all about small town rivalry. I was born in a small town.



I want you to notice something. Philip does not take the bait and plunge into an argument with Nathanael about the merits of Jesus' hometown. Instead, he issues a simple

invitation, "Come and see" (1:46). Come and see this Jesus for yourself.

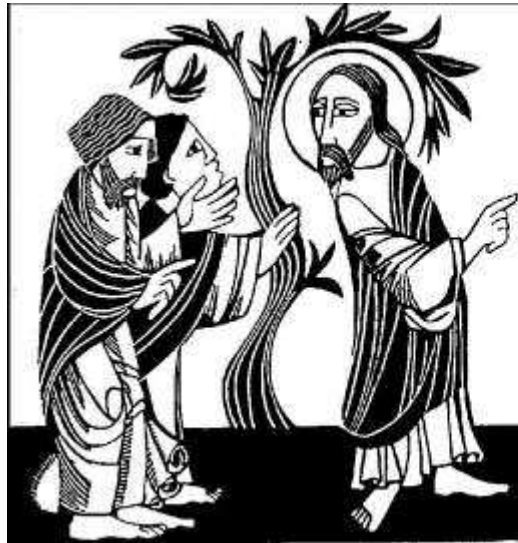
Philip and Nathanael go together to see Jesus. Jesus takes one look at Nathanael and announces, "Here is an Israelite in whom there is no guile." Jesus recognizes there's not a false bone in Nathanael's body. He's a true seeker after God.

"How do you know me?" Nathanael asks. "I saw you when you were sitting under the fig tree before Philip called you," Jesus answered (1:48). This is getting spooky. How is it possible for Jesus to see Nathanael when he is out of sight?

Jesus responds, in effect, 'You haven't seen nothin' yet.' "Truly, I tell you, you will see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of man" (1:51). Jesus references a dream Jacob had in the book of Genesis in which angels were going up and down a ladder

between heaven and earth. Jesus correlates this ladder to his own life and ministry. Jesus descends from heaven to show us the way back to the Father. He will condescend even further when he goes to the cross on our behalf. He will be resurrected to life again and ascend to the right hand of God the Father. In other words, Jesus becomes the everlasting point-of-contact between heaven and earth. Jesus will serve as our go-between and mediator.

Philip's first act of following Jesus is to invite his friend to follow Jesus with him. Philip doesn't first seek out a perfect stranger. He goes to a trusted friend.



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We will more likely have a ready audience with people who live in closest proximity to us. Who are the people in your sphere of influence: Family members, coworkers, classmates and friends? These are the people who are more likely to give our faith a fair hearing since trust is already well-established.

The second thing I observe about Philip's faith-sharing is that he doesn't pressure his friend into believing. Nobody likes to be pressured into anything. Pressuring people to believe is such a turn-off. Take a page from Philip's book. "Come and see." Come and see this Jesus for yourself.

So what difference does this sermon on sharing faith make in my life?

Let me go back to the way I began this sermon by talking about the election. We are people of hope. We trust in God's redemptive purposes for all people. Isaiah reminds us that "those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength" (Isaiah 40:31).



What would you say to a friend about faith? Consider the assignment I gave to the men last Monday Night. I gave them the task of writing out what

they would say about faith in 100 words or less. Why a hundred words? Most of the Christian testimonies I've heard are too long-winded and rambling. One hundred words keeps it short and on-point. If we say less, we make it possible for people to ask more.

I encouraged this group of men to give a before and after snapshot of their life of faith. What it was like before they came to faith in Christ and what are their lives like now with Christ? Tell people in easy to understand language the difference Jesus has made in your life.

Let me provide a few examples to illustrate my point. The first is from Bob Buford, a popular Christian author and speaker. He writes, "I was nothing but a bored rich guy. And then I met Christ. He has moved me from mere success to significance. In my relationship with Christ, I am finally discovering purpose for my life."

The second example is from my own life. "There was something missing in my life. I couldn't pinpoint what it was. I just felt empty inside. I was able to fill this emptiness for a time, but nothing seemed to satisfy this longing. Then,

I met Jesus Christ and opened my life to him. My emptiness has been filled. I am no longer searching for things to fill my life.”

One more example will suffice. I asked Stan if he would be willing to share his faith story with you, and here he is to tell you about it: “I grew up as an ordinary kid in a family that did not attend church. I first heard about Jesus from an evangelist who came to the Georgia Tech campus when I was a student. He talked about Jesus and when he invited us to open our hearts to Jesus, I realized there was nothing I had ever wanted to do more in my life. While I know the tension of the new self that wants to serve God and the old self that wants to serve itself, I also know our Lord just keeps on loving me and encouraging me to love and serve him more.”

I’m inviting you to take this challenge and write out what you would say in 100 words or less. Find a way to share your faith story simply and to the point. Consider it your elevator speech for faith. Share it whenever it seems appropriate. Don’t decide beforehand whether someone will be interested in what you have to say. Some of the people I thought would be interested were not all that interested. And some of the people I thought were the farthest away were actually all about what I had to say.

Maybe you are new here and the thought of living a life of faith is foreign to you. Perhaps Philip’s words to his friend Nathanael are appropriate to your situation. Come and see. Come and see this Jesus for yourself. Read the story of his life. Ask Jesus to be revealed to you. Hang around his followers.

For those of you who claim to be his followers, I urge you to follow Philip’s lead. His first act



of following Jesus is to invite his friend to follow Jesus with him. *Come and see* evolves naturally into *go and tell*. *Come and see* Jesus for yourself. *Go and tell* your friends about him.

We're talking about sharing our faith during November because we want you to invite family, friends, coworkers and classmates to church next month. December is the one time of year when people are more receptive about coming to church. We're offering a class next Sunday morning about having faith conversations at Christmas. We want you to invite people to our brass concert, Handel's Messiah and our annual Glorious Sounds Christmas concert. During the four Sundays leading up to Christmas, we will be preaching about "The Difference Jesus Makes." And there's always Christmas Eve.

It all comes down to friendship. Make a friend. Be a friend. Bring a friend to Jesus.

Conversations at Christmas 11.20



Church Street Stroll 11.28

Cathedral Brass 12.4

Handel's Messiah 12.11

Glorious Sounds 12.18

**The Difference Jesus Makes: Sunday services
11.27, 12.4, 11, 18**

Christmas Eve Services 12.24