

Rev. Dr. Alan Meyers
“Come and See”
First Presbyterian Church of Kirkwood
Sunday, January 17, 2021

1 Samuel 3:1-10

Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the LORD under Eli. The word of the LORD was rare in those days; visions were not widespread.

At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room; the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was. Then the LORD called, ‘Samuel! Samuel!’ and he said, ‘Here I am!’ and ran to Eli, and said, ‘Here I am, for you called me.’ But he said, ‘I did not call; lie down again.’ So he went and lay down. The LORD called again, ‘Samuel!’ Samuel got up and went to Eli, and said, ‘Here I am, for you called me.’ But he said, ‘I did not call, my son; lie down again.’ Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, and the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him. The LORD called Samuel again, a third time. And he got up and went to Eli, and said, ‘Here I am, for you called me.’ Then Eli perceived that the LORD was calling the boy. Therefore Eli said to Samuel, ‘Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, “Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.”’ So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

Now the LORD came and stood there, calling as before, ‘Samuel! Samuel!’ And Samuel said, ‘Speak, for your servant is listening.’

John 1:35-51

The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, ‘Look, here is the Lamb of God!’ The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, ‘What are you looking for?’ They said to him, ‘Rabbi’ (which translated means Teacher), ‘where are you staying?’ He said to them, ‘Come and see.’ They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o’clock in the afternoon. One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. He first found his brother Simon and said to him, ‘We have found the Messiah’ (which is translated Anointed). He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, ‘You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas’ (which is translated Peter).

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, ‘Follow me.’ Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, ‘We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth.’ Nathanael said to him, ‘Can anything good come out of Nazareth?’ Philip said to him, ‘Come and see.’ When Jesus saw Nathanael coming towards him, he said of him, ‘Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!’ Nathanael asked him, ‘Where did you come to know me?’ Jesus answered, ‘I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.’ Nathanael replied, ‘Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!’ Jesus answered, ‘Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these.’ And he said to him, ‘Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.’

Well, it is very good to be with you once again here. I always say we are together by the power of the internet but even more by the power of the Holy Spirit who joins people together even though they may be physically far apart. It's good to be with you here in the sanctuary and with all of you this morning. It's hard to believe, but this year it has been 61 years since Dr. Seuss published that classic of literature for children learning to read, Green Eggs and Ham. If you've been the parent of a child or have worked with small children or if you have been a child any time since 1960, you probably know the story of Green Eggs and Ham. It's about a funny little character named Sam-I-Am who tries to get another character to eat a plate of green eggs and ham. The other character won't do it. He flatly refuses. He won't eat them with a fox or in a box or in a boat or in a coat or any other way. He says, "I will not eat green eggs and ham. I will not eat them, Sam-I-Am," until finally Sam-I-Am says, "Well, just try some. Try the green eggs and ham," and he does. And what do you know? It's good. Green eggs and ham becomes his favorite food.

Well, that's a very silly story, even for Dr. Seuss, but it has a serious point. The book is intended to teach children that there are a lot of things in life that you can't know about until you try them for yourself. It's a lesson we may all need to be reminded of from time to time. If we really want to know about something, we can't prejudge that thing and we can't hang back and just take other people's word for it. We have to come and see for ourselves. We don't know what a new recipe tastes like until we've tasted that recipe. We don't know what a parachute jump is like until we've made a parachute jump. And I say that with authority as one who has never made a parachute jump and I don't know what it's like. I admit it. We don't know what a new acquaintance is really like until we've been with that person for a while, talked with them, spent some time getting to know that person. With so many things in life, we don't really know until we come and see for ourselves.

"Come and see," those were the words Jesus addressed to those two disciples in our scripture reading from the gospel of John, "Come and see." These two men had been disciples of John the Baptist. And they were standing with John one day when Jesus walked by, and John pointed Jesus out and said, "Here is the lamb of God." And as soon as he said this, these two disciples left John and went along with Jesus. According to the gospel of John, John the Baptist was prepared for this sort of thing. He expected his followers to leave him eventually and follow Jesus. John had begun a kind of revival, a great spiritual renewal movement among the Jews of his day, preaching that they should repent, change their way of life, and be baptized as a sign of that new life. But John the gospel writer says in the fourth gospel that the real reason for John's renewal movement all along was to prepare for the coming of Jesus. And so, he's not at all surprised and he's not unhappy when his disciples leave him to become disciples of Jesus. John the Baptist will say in John 3:30, he will say, "He, Jesus, he must increase and I must decrease." That is to say, Jesus' following must grow and mine must diminish. When Jesus turned around and saw these two former disciples of John were tagging along after him, he asked them, "What are you looking for?" What a pregnant question that is. What are you looking for? If someone asked you that, what would you answer? What are you looking for? A parking place, a new house, a different job. What are you looking for? Happiness, love, peace of mind, peace in our country, a purpose and meaning in life. Are you looking for God without maybe being fully aware of it yourself? When you turned on your computer and logged on to the service this morning, what were you looking for? Are you looking to follow along after Jesus as these two disciples in the story did? What are we looking for and how shall we find it?

When Jesus asked these two men in the story, that question, what are you looking for? I suspect they were kind of flustered and embarrassed. They didn't know how to answer. They weren't sure yet just what they were looking for. They only knew that their former master had pointed out this man, Jesus, as the one, someone uniquely worthy of being followed. But they didn't know Jesus yet. They didn't know what to expect from him. They didn't know what kind of a savior, what kind of a messiah, what kind of a lamb of God he would turn out to be. And not knowing how to say that exactly, they answered, "Well, well, where are you staying, teacher?" Which I suppose was just a way of saying, "Tell us about yourself, Jesus. We want to learn about you. Are you really the Messiah, the anointed one? What can we expect from you? Who are you?" Jesus answered their question in what I suppose is the only way he could. He said, "Come and see." He said that as if to say, "Come on and find out for yourselves

where I'm staying, who I am, what you can expect from me. Come on and stay with me a while. Get to know me, follow after me, and then you'll know for yourselves who I am." If these two young men wanted to know Jesus, they had to come and see for themselves. They couldn't hang back and take John the Baptist's word for it. They couldn't even settle for just a short and simple answer from Jesus himself. They had to follow him, have a personal relationship with him. They had to come and see.

Later on, another man, Phillip, became a disciple of Jesus and he went to tell his friend Nathaniel about him. If Phillip found Nathaniel and said to him, "We have found about who Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, "Jesus, son of Joseph from Nazareth." Nathaniel was skeptical. "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Nazareth, in Nathaniel's opinion, was a one-horse town of no particular importance. And it seems highly unlikely that the Messiah would come from there. But Phillips said, "Come and see." Come and meet Jesus for yourself. Come and see for yourself. It's the only way you'll ever get to know who he is. It's interesting to notice that when Phillip tells Nathaniel about Jesus, he says that Jesus is, "the son of Joseph." But when Nathaniel has actually met Jesus for himself face to face personally, he says to Jesus, "You are the son of God." To know who Jesus really is, to have faith in him, to have the joy and peace that he can give, we have to come and see, get to know him for ourselves. We cannot hang back and take the pastor's word for it or our parent's word or anyone else's any more than Nathaniel could take Philip's word. We will find what we are looking for in life in Jesus Christ. But we will find it only if we come ourselves to learn of him, keep our eyes fixed on him, listen to him closely, pay attention to him. The joy of life in Christ is possible only if we try obeying him, only if we try devoting every part of our lives to doing what he commands. We will know Jesus only if we follow him. And we have to follow faithfully. We can't give up as soon as the first flush of enthusiasm wears off or as soon as following Christ becomes difficult.

The Gospel of John plays with this word, stay, in our passage for today. It says that the two disciples, "came and saw where Jesus was staying and they stayed with him that day." Actually, in our translation, it says, "They remained with him." But in the original Greek, it's the same word that earlier in the passage is translated, stay. The same Greek word appears many times in the Gospel of John. We're told that, "the Messiah remains," or, "stays forever," for example. And we're also told more than once about people staying with him and becoming his disciples. The point seems to be that you have to stay with Jesus. You have to stick with him faithfully if you want to come to know him. Robert K. Hudnut, a Presbyterian minister wrote about a college student who tried to [sum?] to follow Jesus but was not very persistent. This young man said to Hudnut, "I tried loving my neighbor and all that Christian stuff. I tried for three weeks [laughter] but it didn't work. It was too boring. Besides, my friends were laughing at me." Robert Hudnut comments, "This boy was working until midnight every night for money to date his girlfriend. He worked hard at that. But to stick with Jesus Christ more than three weeks was beyond him." This is probably the case with many people who do not have faith in Christ. How many unbelievers really know anything about him in the first place? How many have read the New Testament for themselves? How many have taken the trouble to study Christian teachings and to ponder them, to think about them deeply how many have come to church and really paid attention to what goes on here? How many have gone after Jesus following him and trying to learn from him and about him? Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, "Do not say you have not got faith. You will not have it so long as you persist in disobedience and refuse to take the first step." How many of us who claim that we do believe in Christ, how many of us suffer from a boring and dead spiritual life? Do we really try to follow Christ closely day by day? Do we really come and see the one we call Lord and stay with him like those two disciples in the gospel did? Stay with him through daily Bible reading and prayer and meditation. How many of us can truthfully say that we try to live our lives every day in obedience to our Lord in every way, in every aspect of our lives? How many of us can say that we have fully accepted the constant discipline it takes if we really want to know Jesus Christ and to know the God who comes to meet us in him? Notice another thing, notice that no one comes to the Lord and no one stays with him alone. When we come and see the Lord and when we stay with him, we always do it together with a community. The two disciples came to Jesus only because John the Baptist told them about Jesus. Simon Peter only comes because his brother Andrew told him. Nathaniel comes only because Philip told him. We meet the Lord through our ministry to each other. And we know the Lord in and

through the other members of the community.

This is why it's so delightful, it's such a joy whenever we have new people in church and it's a special joy when someone comes to church for the first time and they're here because they were invited to come, invited by some member of the congregation. When you invite someone to come to church with you, you may not be using these words, but you're really saying, "Come and see. Come and meet the Lord." Because it's here, it's in Christ's community that we meet Jesus Christ. I saw a sign outside a church building once that said, "Does God seem far away? Who do you think moved?" No one should expect to know how to play the piano without studying the piano and practicing. No one should expect to know how to play a sport without learning about that sport and practicing it. And no one should expect to know God without studying Christ and practicing being a follower of his. Friends, I think every preacher in the United States this Sunday and last Sunday has been pondering what to say in the sermon to address the extraordinary trouble and pain our country has gone through since January 6th. Well, I might apply what I've been saying thus far in the sermon to our national crisis in some such way as this. If I come and see Jesus, really meet him through the scripture and with the leading of the Holy Spirit, if I really come to know what he's like, what will I know?

Well, I know some negative things. I know some things that I will not find. I know that I cannot imagine Jesus approving of or encouraging mindless violence against one's political opponents, whatever one's politics might be. I cannot see Jesus approving of using lies, demonstrable falsehoods to pull people away from reality so as to encourage violence. I cannot imagine Jesus approving of the wearing of a camp Auschwitz t-shirt or approving of anything Nazi. What the mob did at the Capitol on January 6th and any encouragement that mob received to do it, all of that is completely opposed to, entirely against who our Lord Jesus really is. And positively, what does our Lord approve of? I believe he approves of reconciliation. I believe he approves of forgiveness of enemies. I believe he approves of movements toward unity in church and in the nation. I don't think it's a cheap reconciliation or forgiveness and unity without any accountability. It may be a hard one, reconciliation and forgiveness and unity, but it's got to be real. But our Lord approves of, I think-- has got to look a lot like that beloved community that was the great vision of the man whose birthday we're going to be celebrating tomorrow.

Christ's invitation is for you and me, He calls us, just as he called those two disciples of John the Baptist. He says, "Come and see and stay with me. Come and take the step of trusting me and obeying me and really trying to get to know me. Come and see." Amen.