

2nd Sunday of Epiphany, 2015

Gospel: John 1:43-51

Sermon: "Come & See...Go & Tell"

Tempest is my niece. She is five years old. Last summer she came for a visit. It was a very big event in our family life –my father's 80th birthday. Tempest was so very excited about the big day. She could not contain herself. And, she wanted to make sure that I was included on everything. She would run into the house and call for me, "Moster, Moster." (That means Mother's Sister or Aunt in Danish.) "Come and see – what I did. I made a present for Bestefar. (That means Grandfather in Norwegian.) And then, she would grab my hand and pull me towards her. A little while later she would return, "Moster, Moster. Come and see – I putted little Norway flags on Bestefar's cake. It is beautiful." Once again, she would reach for my hand and tug me out the door. And, once more she came back, "Moster. Moster. Come and see – mommy and I putted up all the balloons, and the plates, and the flowers. It is so pretty." And, she took my hand and pulled me away from what I was doing. (*Sigh.*)

But, you know each time that Tempest came – I would follow her. I followed her willingly, even eagerly. I followed her because I love Tempest with all my heart. I followed her because her enthusiasm was contagious. I followed her because she kept coming back to get me. Come and See. And, I followed.

Today's Gospel reading may be familiar to many of us. It seems to be a run-of-the-mill story about Jesus calling the disciples. It actually begins earlier in this chapter. First, it is John the Baptist who is teaching and preaching and saying to Andrew: "Look, this is Jesus the Christ. Come and see." And very quickly, he follows Jesus. Within hours, Andrew rushes to his brother Simon and eagerly tells him: "Look, this is Jesus the Christ. Really, it is. Come and see." And, just as quickly Simon who is renamed Peter – follows Jesus. It is like a game of dominoes – one tells the other and the other tells another – and on it goes. Come and See. And, they followed. And, that's pretty much how the Christian faith has been passed down for over 2,000 years – from one person to another.

Now, we come to this little story about the newly called rookie disciple, Philip. Philip is so very excited. He cannot contain himself. He has yet to attend a single Bible study led by Jesus – but he knows, he knows – this is the real deal. And what do we do when we have big exciting news? Well, we go and tell the people we love the most. Philip seeks out his best friend – Nathaniel. But, Nathaniel, well – he is – at best a skeptic. At worst – he is a smart aleck. He even makes some snarky comments about Jesus' hometown. Philip would certainly have known that this is exactly how Nathaniel would react. He knows the kind of person that

Nathaniel was. He knew that Nathaniel looked down on anyone who wasn't born and raised in Cana – the town he was from. So, why would he do that? Surely there would be a safer person that Philip could have told this news. Someone who wouldn't immediately ridicule the news and put a damper on all Philip's excitement.

But, Philip is totally unfazed. He did not argue. He doesn't become angry or defensive. He doesn't make a snide comment back to Nathaniel. Philip doesn't "unfriend" Nathaniel and turn his back on him. We could all certainly understand if Philip had reacted like that. We've all been there – when our ideas, our experiences, our stories – are treated with contempt by someone we care deeply about. But, Philip stands his ground. He is calm. Philip is still excited but he says these incredibly grace-filled words. He says simply, "Come and see." I can actually see him grabbing Nathaniel's hand and tugging him along, "Come and see." Nathaniel follows him and in doing so Nathaniel actually meets Jesus. A miracle.

In my entire ministry (which is a whole bunch of years) – I do not know of anyone who came to the faith because they were argued in to it. In fact, more often than not it is arguments that turn people away from the faith.

Maybe it is the simplicity of it that frightens us – that prevents us – from inviting others. Come and see. These are the words that sum up what it means to be a follower of Jesus. We are not called to ram the faith down the throats of people that we meet. I can find no Biblical evidence for threatening people with hell if they do not join Custer Lutheran Fellowship. But as disciples, we are called to invite. Come and see.

The truth of the matter is – that many – maybe even most – people – even those we love the most – are more like Nathaniel. Skeptical. They will politely dismiss us or angrily protest or make snide remarks. If you think about it – we live in a world gone amok – and this good news of God's love – can be hard to believe. You mean, God – creator of the cosmos – cares about me?! You've got to be kidding! Nathaniel's skepticism and the negativity of those we meet today – is more understandable than we would like to admit. But, here's the deal. As followers of Jesus, we are not called to convert people. It is the Holy Spirit that brings about faith in the lives of people. We are called to share our excitement, "Come and See" and to bring them so that they might actually meet Jesus. A miracle.

Let us remember too that it is not our beautiful church building or our wonderful programs that we are inviting people to Come and See. No, we are inviting our friends, our families, our neighbors to come and see Jesus. The building, the

programs, Custer Lutheran Fellowship – only exist to bring people to Jesus. It should be easy. But somehow, we have made it so difficult.

Maybe we should take a lesson from the children. You probably know that we began an after-school children's program this fall which we call SPARK Kids. It has grown quickly. Many have asked me – what we did, how we made that happen. Really folks, we did very little – we sent out some postcards, we put up a sign. But what has grown the ministry – is the children. Every week we have new children coming. They are coming because children are inviting other children. Come and see. This is a fun place. We do fun things. We have snacks. We play games. We do projects. We read stories. Come and see. That's how it started.

But this last week – I realized that the children are beginning to make the faith connections in real concrete ways. After SPARK Kids on Wednesdays, there is a meal and then worship. More families are staying for this so we decided that we would focus our worship on the same Bible stories that the SPARK Kids are learning that week. This past week it was the story of Eli and Samuel – the same story we had in our First Reading this morning. After worship, one of our SPARK Kids, ran out to catch up with me, "Yvonne, Yvonne." She said, "Did you hear that story about Samuel? That is the story we learned in SPARK Kids and I knew it." She said proudly. The first step in this little girl actually meeting Jesus. A miracle. All because someone said - Come and See.

We are here in this place because someone said to us Come and See. Maybe it was several people. Maybe it was over a whole lot of time. But somehow God kept coming back to us. Tugging at our hand. And, we followed.

All of us, have been called by Jesus to be His disciples. It even says it in the bulletin. Go ahead and take a look under "Ministering at Custer Lutheran Fellowship". It reads **Ministers: All Members of CLF!** (It even ends with an exclamation point!) Maybe you're wondering when that happened. Maybe you're thinking, "I didn't sign up for that." God has called each of us again and again to be His disciples. It began at your baptism – in a splash of water. It was affirmed at your confirmation – with a laying on of hands. It is repeated each week as we say what we believe in the words of the creed. Come and See. We are called. We have followed. And now, Jesus says to each of us, Go and Tell!