

January 14, 2018

John 1:43-51

Grace and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen.

It started last spring. First it was one or two here and there. Then it became 3 or 4 a week. And by this past summer it had become 2, 3, and 4 each day. Every single time I went to open the mail box, I knew what I would find. Postcards and mailings from colleges and universities offering the same invitation to my high school senior, "Come and see." OK, so the words on all those mailings weren't literally "Come and See" as we hear Philip offer to Nathaniel or we first hear Jesus speak to Andrew and Peter in verse 39, just prior to this morning's passage. Nonetheless, that is exactly what all those postcards and letters were saying. Come and see our campus. Come and see our programs of study. Come and see our professors and students. Come and see how we can prepare you for the next stage of your life. Come and see why we think this is the right place for you. Of course, one of the goals of these mailings is to get enough students to say yes is to get one more paying tuition. It boils down to finances. That is part of doing business. Yet, I also think they are sent because the leaders, professors, and all other staff do truly believe that their institution is a great place to learn. They will impact the lives of their students. They are making a difference. They have faith in

their mission and they want to share that all the while knowing probably only a small percentage of those receiving those promotional fliers may actually go and visit or fill out an application. Nonetheless they continue.

At some point and time in our lives each of us have been offered the invitation to come and see. While many of us have gone to church before we even knew how to crawl and never heard the invitation the fact remains someone, most likely a parent, took us there because they believed it was important. Jesus had offered the same invitation to them. Their lives had been shaped and changed by the workings of the Holy Spirit. They had witnessed the love of Christ through the people they met at church. They had experienced the grace of God through the words of forgiveness proclaimed there. They had been fed over the years through Sunday school, adult studies, worship, the word of God preached and proclaimed, the fellowship with fellow brothers and sisters in faith, and most certainly by the sacraments of baptism and communion. They had had encounters with the risen Lord Jesus Christ. They had heard his voice. They had felt and seen his presence in their lives and in the world.

Still others of us may have not heard the invitation to come and see until we were older. Perhaps, it was our spouse. Perhaps, it was another relative or a coworker or neighbor. Or perhaps, it was a friend who invited us to come and see

vacation Bible school. I recall one young child several years ago walk in the first day of VBS with another child hand-in-hand. I didn't recognize the other child and I didn't have to even ask who he was. Before I could even open my mouth that young boy, who had been to VBS each year, told me this was his best friend in the world. He was so excited. The joy on his face. He then told me he had asked his friend to come because VBS was fun. This young boy may not have known much yet about the Bible. About Jesus. But he knew there was something about VBS he wanted his friend to experience. He knew there was something about his church he wanted his friend to see and so he had offered the simple invitation to "come and see." He knew there was something in the song he sung that said Jesus loved him. Like us adults, he wasn't concerned with answers to the why's and how's or caught up in debates over proper theologies or biblical interpretations. No, all he knew was this was a place he wanted to be and for his friend to be also.

Or maybe it's the invitation to "come and see" offered to a brother or sister who has lost their way. Perhaps, they have witnessed the brokenness of the church. Its penchant, at times, for its members to seek after their own needs and fail to see the needs of another. To fail to see something good can even come for the Nazareth's of our time; such as a third-world country. Or it's the infighting that so often occurs within the church or the hypocrisy that so often runs counter

to the gospel of Jesus Christ we proclaim to live by or the self-righteousness we all at times wear. Or perhaps it's just because something is happening in their lives and they simply can't see the need for church. Or they feel they are no longer worthy. Or they are so depressed they can't see the light shining in the darkness.

Take Joe for instance. He had lost his job as the result of downsizing. The bills were mounting and he was having a hard time finding another job. He began to think something was wrong with him. Self-doubt had set in. Depression had encircled him. He had stopped going to church. Prayer for another job had seemed to fall on deaf ears. What good was church he thought? All they want is my money, which had become scarce. Luckily, Mike had noticed Joe had been absent for quite some time. He hadn't seen him around town in a while. It would have been so easy for Mike to simply do nothing. But after several weeks of not seeing Joe, Mike stopped by one day and told him he missed him. What was wrong? Why had he stopped coming to church? Had he been hurt? Was he going somewhere else? He learned what Joe was going through. How he felt worthless. How his prayers didn't seem to matter. How he questioned God's presence. Mike sat with him and at the end prayed with Joe. Mike was not the praying out loud type of guy. He had never done it but something moved him to do it and so, after asking Joe if he could offer a prayer, he prayed a short and simple prayer that Joe

would feel God's presence and God would hear Joe's prayers and open another door for Joe. And after that he invited Joe to come and worship next week. Mike would be there. He would sit with Joe so he wasn't alone. In essence, he said "Come and see." And Joe did go. He didn't find a job until several weeks later but he shared with so many people the story of what Mike had done. How it was just what he needed. He had been lost and he desperately needed someone to offer the invitation to "come and see." He had forgotten the power of being in the company of his fellow brothers and sisters. He had missed the words spoken in Holy Communion, "This is my body and my blood given for you." Mike was a quiet and humble man of faith and he would say, I didn't really do anything much. Well, maybe that is how it seemed. A simple prayer. A brief visit. A short invitation to return to church. But for Joe, it was a mountainous gesture. A transformative experience. A needed invitation. An unanswered prayer. What Mike had done was the exact same thing that young boy had done. He knew God was at work within the church. He knew Jesus' love for all people. He loved the church he attended, the people he was surrounded by, and the grace he received each and every week when he was forgiven time and time again for failing to extend the invitation to "come and see." Or failing to see the good in his neighbor. Or failing to offer forgiveness. But he knew Jesus was present and that Jesus changed his

life. Jesus gave him his identity as a child of God. Jesus gave him strength in the midst of his own dark times. Jesus filled his heart with joy. Jesus offered him grace upon grace and he so wanted Joe to once again experience that.

At times we may feel our invitation to “come and see” simply goes unheard. Like those college fliers, they simply are discarded with the recipient paying little attention. Yet, our passage this morning reveals they aren’t. Because they are Jesus filled invitations and we know God can do a lot with very little. The risen Christ is present in three simple words “come and see.” Come and see Jesus offers the invitation to us. Come and see Jesus speaks the invitation through us to others. Come and see – love, peace, joy, compassion and forgiveness. Come and see a God who goes to the cross. Rises from the dead. Offers new life. Come and see!