

John 1: 29-51
Come and See
First Presbyterian Church
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I don't know how many of you are or have been in positions of making hiring decisions. It is never easy to find just the right person who has the qualifications for the job and who will also fit in with the team, the office, the other employees, the customers, whatever the job calls for. Its easy to assess the education, the experience, and the skills. It is much harder to get at things like personality, character, dependability, creativity, loyalty, etc. And in the final analysis it is those very things which will be the most important on the job and will determine if this person is the right one for the position.

This morning we see Jesus hiring the first disciples. We don't usually think about it as hiring but he is choosing those people who will assist him in his ministry and those who will carry on the ministry when he is gone. He is deciding who has the traits and talents that will be necessary for the work that is ahead of them.

The text begins at the time of Jesus baptism. As we learned last week his own preparation for the work of ministry. The story begins with John introducing Jesus to the people standing near him and to some of his own disciples. It isn't a personal introduction with names exchanged and handshakes all around. Rather it is John watching Jesus pass by and telling the people around him who Jesus is. John uses several terms to describe Jesus. Terms that would be familiar to a Jewish audience - lamb of God, the one who received the Spirit, the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit, the

Son of God. Titles that would have little significance to those outside of the Jewish faith.

Its interesting to note that John doesn't offer any proof of the things he has said about Jesus. He makes great claims for Jesus but he gives nothing to back up his comments. What he says is his own conviction based on his own experience with Jesus and with the voice of God. He doesn't even go so far as to relate the voice from heaven at the time of baptism to back up his claims. One interpreter of this passage says that John simply spoke the reality of Jesus into the world. Jesus own life from this point on would flesh out the words that John uses.

As a result of John's unsubstantiated testimony about Jesus two of his own disciples decide to leave him and follow Jesus. They are literally following along behind him when Jesus stops and turns around. And he puts a question to them, "What are you looking for?" In the Gospel of John you always have to be alert for several layers of meaning in almost every verbal exchange that involves Jesus. These are the first words of Jesus in John's Gospel and as such they carry great weight. In the other Gospels the first words of Jesus have to do with the coming of the kingdom. Here Jesus asks these people who are following him, "What are you looking for?" It is the question Jesus puts to every one who would be a disciple. It is the pivotal question of the interview.

What is it you want from Jesus? What do you expect from him? Why are you following him? They are the questions that we also must wrestle with. Many who followed Jesus did so because they wanted to see the miracles he performed. They wanted to be amazed and thrilled. They wanted to be able to claim they were there when it happened. They didn't want to be involved but they wanted a front row seat for the spectacular.

There are still people who just want to be close to the action, who want to claim that they know Jesus the miracle worker.

There were others who followed Jesus because they needed something from him to make their life complete. They were looking for favors of one kind or another. They wanted him to solve their problems or make life better in some way. They had a problem they couldn't solve and they wanted Jesus to make everything all right. They only followed him to get what they wanted. Their numbers continue today.

Andrew and his companion did not fit into these categories. When Jesus asked them what they were looking for the first word out of their mouth was, "Rabbi". Rabbi means teacher according to the text. They were looking for a teacher. They were looking for someone who could teach them about God and about life. They were looking for someone who would help them get deeper into the things they already knew. When they ask Jesus, "where are you staying?" they aren't simply inquiring about his living quarters. They are asking if they can become his disciples, if they can sit at his feet and learn from him, if they can spend their days in conversation with him, if they can live with him and learn from him.

Jesus response to their question is to invite them to "come and see". Again they are the words Jesus addresses to any serious would-be disciple. The invitation is to live with him a while and learn from him. One of the expositors on this text says that we should pay attention to the order of the words that come from Jesus mouth. Most of us would say that after we have understood, after we have considered all the evidence, after we have been convinced, after we see who he is then maybe we will make the decision to follow him. Jesus invites the two to come first. And in the following they will eventually see what it is he would teach them. They will begin to

understand all the titles John applied to him.

This little interchange between Jesus and John's disciples tells us a lot about them. And it probably told Jesus all he needed to know. They were willing to be taught. Willing to have their ideas challenged, upset, overturned and changed. Willing to go in new directions. Willing to leave much behind. And on this day they could have no way of knowing what all they would learn in the three years they would spend with Jesus. They could not possibly know all they would learn about themselves, about their motives and their sinful desires, about their fears and their cowardice, about their strength and their capacity for faith. They had no idea what they would learn about God and God's grace and mercy.

The primary qualification for a disciple, then and now, is the willingness to be taught. A heart that admits that it has more questions than answers. A mind that is always open to an expanding knowledge. And a spirit that is humble enough to place itself under the authority of Jesus letting him be the teacher.

In the 39th verse it says that after they saw where Jesus was staying they remained with him for the day. If you look up in verse 32 and 33 you will see that the word remain is used there as well. Many prophets had spoken by the spirit but the spirit came and went. John says twice that the spirit came and remained with Jesus. The spirit remained with Jesus and the disciples also remained with him. Discipleship is not a quick visit, it is not a short term commitment, it is not something to undertake for a season. To be a disciple is to remain in a position of learning. To be continually open to the teaching of God's Holy Spirit. There is no graduation for the disciple, it is a lifetime of learning and growing.

Then in our text an interesting thing happens. Andrew is convinced

that what John said about Jesus is true. He is convinced not by any external proof but because of his own encounter with Christ. And so he goes and gets his brother and what he says to Simon sounds eerily like what John said to him, “We have found the Messiah”. And in Galilee the next day the same thing happens. Philip is convinced and he goes and gets Nathanael and makes his testimony to him. And when Nathanael is unconvinced Philip repeats the exact words of Jesus, “come and see”.

You may think that what we have here is the story of Jesus calling his first disciples. A story, by the way, which is distinctly different than the stories of Jesus calling his first disciples in Matthew, Mark and Luke. But what this is is an account of how the church has always worked. John, who is the baptizer can be compared to the church that also does the baptizing in the world. It is the job of the church, if you will, to speak the reality of Jesus into the world. To call attention to Jesus and to name him. To speak of him in traditional terms. To continually lift up who he is.

But all of that will have little value if individuals do not then decide to follow him. If individuals are not looking for a teacher who will challenge them. Who will teach them about God, and life, and themselves. Individuals who will put much behind them so that they can go where Jesus takes them. The church can point the way to Christ and the church can proclaim who Christ is, but the church can never take the place of a personal relationship with the Rabbi.

But it does not stop with the individual and his or her relationship with Christ. What happened to Andrew and Philip will happen to disciples in every age. They will share with someone what they have come to believe and the invitation will be offered, “come and see”.

In Matthew Jesus is revealed to be the Son of God by a voice from

heaven. In John Jesus is revealed through the ordinary conversation of human beings, the human inclination to share good news, the tendency to tell someone else about a deal that is too good to be true. Disciples are those through whom the living Christ is revealed in ordinary ways.

Let us pray.