

Come and See - A Gracious Invitation

Nick Mountfort 14 January, 2017

Reading: John 1:29-42

***Open the meaning of the Bible to us in fresh and new way.
In Jesus' name. Amen***

The first few words said by someone are very important. I heard of a bishop visiting a congregation. He rose into the pulpit to greet the faithful. The congregation was well versed in Anglican responses. His first words were, "There is something wrong with this microphone." To which the people responded, "And also with you."

Jesus first words in the whole of John's Gospel are, "What are you looking for?" This theme is central to John's gospel. Many seek Jesus: some want to kill him, others want to know more about him. Jesus is always the gentlemen. He graciously asks of the person, "What are you looking for?" allowing them to express their desire.

The two new followers in our gospel stammer an awkward reply. Jesus follows up with the invitation, "Come and see." He doesn't force himself on them. Jesus is asking us the same question, "What are you looking for?" We stammer a reply and he says, "Come and see."

That invitation, "Come and see," has been given to all of us in some way by someone, or we wouldn't be here today. I wonder if you have ever stopped to give thanks for the person who first said it you, "Come and see." Come and see what this Jesus has in store.

Andrew, one of the two, is so taken with Jesus that he remembers the exact time when he first sees him. It was 4 o'clock in the afternoon. Life changing events are like that. We remember the exact moment of important encounters. It matters little to us, the reader, if it's 4 or 6 or 8 o'clock but it matters to Andrew.

Andrew goes and finds Simon, "Come and see," he says to him. Simon goes on to be called Peter or Rocky, and he becomes one of the most important of all the disciples. We can never know the power of the simple invitation, "Come and see." On one of my sabbaticals I took myself off to South East Asia to discover why it is that the Anglican Church is growing so fast in Sabah, Malaysia. The church there uses cell groups. How it works is very simple. A cell group is started in a home. They do Bible study together. And then they invite a friend and/or family to come and see. Very soon, as soon as 9 months, so many are coming that the group becomes two groups. Then those groups multiply into four. The four become eight, the eight become

sixteen. You don't need to be Ernest Rutherford to see that very soon the church becomes enormous.

Andrew, later a saint, was very good at bringing others to Jesus. At the feeding of the 5,000 he was the one who found the little boy who had his lunch turned into enough to feed thousands of people. Later, Andrew found some Greeks who were hungry for meaning in their lives and brought them to Jesus. He also brought Philip. The consequences of these simple acts - many thousands who are hungry are fed, whole new races find the love of God, and many find meaning and purpose for their lives. You see the Good News is too good to be kept to ourselves.

Jesus invites us "Come and see."

One person whose life was turned around by the invitation to come and see is Paul.

Paul Johnson was raised in a loving but non-religious home. The whole family slept in on Sunday mornings. "We thought our neighbours who went to church were wasting their time. Religion was for losers." Paul recalls. When he went to uni Paul took a Western religion course to round out his humanities studies. The professor confirmed his mistrust of the Bible. He taught the students that the Bible was good literature, like Homer's Iliad and Odyssey, but it was outdated and irrelevant to today's world.

Paul married Sue and they were happy. They had money and success but he wasn't satisfied. He recounts, "There was emptiness in my life and I had no clue how to fill it."

"Two years into our marriage we accepted an invitation to an elegant business banquet. When we arrived, I was disappointed to learn it was a Christian event. I decided to stay and see what it was all about only because the meeting was populated with top leaders from my community. That night I heard the gospel message for the first time in my life. The "safe" setting of a business event hosted by my professional peers was disarming. To my surprise, I was interested in the topic for the first time in my life. A week later, I received a phone call from a man who had been at the dinner. "Come and see," he said, what Jesus has to offer. Once again, to my surprise, I agreed to take that step."

"Soon after, we began participating in a Bible discussion group. I was shocked to find that this ancient book was not a bunch of outdated fables but that it was relevant to my current situation. God added a little drama to my story. He finally got my full attention a short time later, through a storm in the middle of the night. On a little boat, at 1:30am, thinking I was about to die, I finally realised my need of God. I was

helpless and I couldn't do a thing to save myself. I needed a Saviour. Hours later, safe and dry in the living room of the couple with whom we were studying the Bible, I accepted God's provision of love for my life."

"The emptiness that used to plague me has been replaced by a wonderful new purpose. We now live our lives out of gratitude to God.

To others I know I say: "Come and see."

To others may we have the courage to say, "Come and see."