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THE SCRIPTURE
John 1:43-51

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 toward him, he said of him, "Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!" Nathanael asked him, "Where did you get 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."

THE MESSAGE
"Come and See"
John DeLaporte

She peeked out at me from the bathroom door. There was a look on her face that was hard to interpret. Excitement was in her eyes but also anxiousness. Or was it fear? There was a smile that conveyed joy beset within a broader expression that also said, "There's no turning back now."

Cynthia and I had been married for several years and had discerned the time was right for us to add some kids to this mix. We picked up a test from the Walgreens, brought it home, followed the instructions, and proceeded to wait for what felt like the longest two minutes in the history of waiting.

“Well?” I asked. “Is it positive or negative?”

Her face softened into a gentle, loving smile. Tears swelled in her eyes. She waved me over saying, “Come and see!” And when I saw the blue “plus” sign staring back at me, I knew my life would never be the same.

All of us have had our own “come and see” moments in our lives. Those interjections or disruptions to the normal course of our routines or best-laid plans. Sometimes, they are big and life changing; pivot points between the time before we witnessed and the time after. Most often, they are simple and mundane interruptions that call our attention away from one thing and refocus on another.

- A coworker who needs to check some work.
- A student trying to get your approval on an assignment.
- A child who absolutely, positively must show you the bug trapped between the window and the screen while you are in the middle of making dinner. “Dad! You have to come and see this right now!” (May or may not have happened to me once or twice this week.)

We can’t always control how or when these come-and-see moments break into our lives, and we can’t always know who the messenger will be. But how we respond and when someone invites us to “come and see” can make all the difference.

How do you respond when someone extends such an invitation? And what do you do when the very one, who is inviting you, is none other than Jesus himself? For a disciple, one seeking after the ways and means of Love, our spiritual journey hinges on moments such as these.

Today, we launch a new sermon series entitled the “{Un} Series,” which is not really a series at all. While offered consecutively and **under** the same series name, the “**UN**” component is the rebellion of having no explicit connection between each message each week. With so many special occasions during this early summer season of baptisms, holidays, and special points of focus, each Sunday will carry a **unique** joy and meaning that is deserving of its own **unique** focus.

Today’s **unique** focus pairs well with our final “Taste and See” showcase of the church year, as our Scripture of choice allow us to eavesdrop on one of my favorite “come-

and-see” moments in the Bible – the call of Nathanael. In breaking open Nathanael’s discipleship story this morning, my hope is that we might learn something about our own as we respond to a God, who is always inviting us to come and see more of what love has to offer.

We pick up in the first chapter of John, where after reading the poetry of the Prologue, the narrator drops us right smack dab in the center of John the Baptist’s work in the wilderness. It is a time filled with *come and see* opportunities. News and excitement are spreading that the long-expectant Messiah is near. People are talking about John and inviting their friends to the banks of the Jordan River. “You got to check this guy out!” John’s movement and message has caught the attention of the Pharisees in the field, who start voicing concern to their hierarchs, “You got to check this guy out!”

Jesus shows up on the scene, and John gives his testimony. “See! I told you! Here he is! I have seen, and I testify that this is the Son of God!” When John sees Jesus the next day, he nudges two of his star students, “Go and see! Look! The Lamb of God.”

And they do. And I imagine Andrew and his unnamed friend nervously approaching Jesus like a super fan stalking a celebrity in the grocery aisle. They ask, “Rabbi, where are you staying?” To which Jesus responds, “Come and you will see.” His words are foreshadowing those of Philip’s a few verses later.

Andrew goes and gets his brother Simon Peter. Philip heads to find Nathanael. As you read this first chapter, it’s easy to sense the eagerness and encounter in the air. Friends telling friends. News spreading person to person. Sort of the first-century version of something going viral.

John’s account of these early call stories stands in contract to those we know and love in the Synoptics where Jesus is doing a lot of the heavy lifting gong town to town, person to person, offering direct calls to follow him. “Simon Peter, James, John. Drop your nets. Let’s go.” “Matthew, leave your tax stand. Tonight, I dine with you.”

To me, John’s telling is more reflective of the way in which we tend to come to faith. I don’t know about you, but Jesus has never appeared to me in person, yet! On days when I’m out in my family boat, and the fish aren’t biting, Jesus has yet to show up on the shore telling me to “cast my pole on the other side.” Last month, as I was neck deep in W2s and Turbo Tax, Jesus did not appear and invite me to dinner.

Rather, when we encounter something exciting... something hopeful... something amazing, we invite others to check it out. We post about it. We put a sign in our yard, or we wear a t-shirt. We tell our friends to come and see. “You’ll ever believe it until you witness it yourself!”

But all that eagerness and excitement grinds to a halt when news reaches Nathanael. Nathanael's buddy Philip has caught the Jesus fever. Philip has been hanging out with John the Baptist for some time and was present when Jesus waded into the waters. You can hear his excitement when he finds his friend. I picture him sweating, panting, and out of breath. *"We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote – Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."*

But Nathanael's eyes do not widen with excitement. He doesn't jump up and down with eagerness and hope. Rather, he offers that now famous line, "Nazareth! Can anything good come from Nazareth?"

I want to hit the "pause button" on our story right there because it is that moment of skepticism and doubt that immediately endears me to my brother Nathanael. In his *"You gotta be kidding me,"* response, I recognize a bit of me. And I think, if we are being honest, we can all recognize a bit of Nathanael's response in our own spirits.

Messiah? Son of God? Really? Incarnation? Resurrection? Water, wine; loaves, fishes? Really?

Church! Sunday mornings? Rules and structures? Committees and controversies? Mess ministry! You got to be kidding me? Can anything good come from any of this?

I think for many of us, our discipleship story begins like Nathanael's, not from open, eager expectancy, but rather from a place of skepticism and guarded heart. This is not to suggest that starting from such a place is a bad thing. Quite the contrary. A healthy spiritual skepticism can be a tremendous asset to the discipleship journey. It can keep us questioning, keep us seeking, keep us from becoming too comfortable or pollyannaish about religion or faith. I have long said that doubt and faith are friends when held in the sort of creative spiritual tension that leads one to a deeper desire to know and to be known. This is different from a less-than-healthy spiritual cynicism often born from pain or fear and presenting as prejudice, dismissiveness, or partisan critique.

So, where is Nathanael's, *"Can anything good come from this,"* response rooted in? Is his skepticism born from a spiritual longing and a desire for something more? A frustration with the status quo and a demand to go deeper? Or is he a spiritual-cynic, burned one too many times by it all, quick to dismiss his converted friend just as another wide-eyed Jesus freak who drank too much of John's Kool-Aid?

It's hard to tell, exactly, because Nathanael's story is a bit of a mystery. He is a disciple known only to John. He is not named in any of the other gospels or references to the

“12.” Some have speculated he is Bartholomew because Bartholomew is often listed after Philip in the other accountings of the disciples. Some suggest he may be Matthew as Matthew’s name means, “gift of Yahweh,” and Nathanael’s translates, “God has given.” Others have argued he is symbolic of all Israel or all people coming to God, while still others speculate, he was simply a “little d” disciple and not one of the actual 12.

But I propose he is any one of us, who has wrestled with deep questions. Who has become dissatisfied with the spiritual status quo. Who has longed beyond all things to glimpse some truth, or to know the love of God in our lives.

For, upon seeing Nathanael, Jesus greets him, *“Here is a true Israelite in whom there is no deceit (nothing false)!”* It’s a salutation that evokes comparison to the patriarch Jacob, the first true Israelite to bear that name. Jacob certainly had a history of deceitfulness himself. He saw heaven open and angels ascending and descending as if from a ladder. Jacob, too, would see God face to face but only after a dark night of wrestling and pain that would transform his being.

Jesus’ strange greeting echoes the prophet Isaiah’s depiction of the suffering servant, who endures great struggle out of a longing for God and “in whose mouth,” Isaiah says, “there is nothing deceitful.”

Yes, Nathanael is one, who struggles and wrestles deeply with scared things. His skepticism is an expression of spiritual integrity. His is a faith that longs to know and isn’t afraid to suffer the pursuit of divine love.

Perhaps this is what he was up to under that fig tree on that fateful day. It was not uncommon for some rabbis to teach or study Torah under fig trees. Sometimes the Law of Moses was compared to a fig tree. Was it sacred law with which he was struggling? Old covenants and new realities?

That phrase, “under the tree” shows up in Talmudic law often when citing evidence of a place where wrongdoing has occurred. Was it personal sin with which he was wrestling? A struggle of conscience? Had he been deceitful? Was he longing to reconcile something false in his own heart? Is Nathanael’s tree an illusion to that primordial tree that bore the first fruits of human despair?

Whatever Nathanael was wrestling with under that tree, he was of the mind that no one had knowledge of that moment. His struggles were of the sort we only do in private. Alone. Behind closed doors where our vulnerability is known only to ourselves and to our God.

Have you been in such a place? Alone. Vul. Under your own fig tree. Wrestling and struggling and wondering what it is all about? Frustrated with the status quo. Longing for more. Carrying questions like a cross. Calling out to God in your own Nathanael moment?

So, it's no surprise that after spending his morning wrestling and struggling, his bright-eyed and enthusiastic Philip isn't greeted with a warm embrace. *"You don't know me, Philip. You don't know what I've been struggling with. You can't possibly imagine. Take our Law of Moses, and Messiah, and kindly leave me be."*

But a good friend doesn't go away that easily; do they? A good friend knows when a "leave me alone" is actually an "I need you now more than ever." Philip knows Nathanael. He knows that Jesus is the answer to Nathanael's longing, and that Nathanael is just the sort of person Jesus wants in his ranks. So, with a spirit of total love and understanding, he looks knowingly at his friend and says, "Come and see."

And when Nathanael ultimately does encounter Jesus, and Jesus intimates personal knowledge of his fig tree moment, Nathanael absolutely crumbles.

"I saw you while you were still under the fig tree. Before Philip called you, I saw you. In your vulnerability. I saw you. In your struggle. I saw you. In your pain, and questions, and longing, I saw you. You true Israelite. You truth teller. I see you, and I know there is nothing false in you."

And from that moment, Nathanael's world pivots. For the first time, Nathanael feels known. Truly known. And in being known, he recognizes the love and the truth he has been longing for. *"Rabbi, you are the Son of God. You are the King of Israel."* Nathanael's life is altered forever!

Friends, every discipleship story begins with a *come-and-see* opportunity such as this. Sometimes, it comes from a Philip in your life. Sometimes it comes from Jesus himself. Sometimes it comes from a community like Broadway, a place filled with Nathanaels and Philips and everyone in between. A place that values skeptics, and seekers, and wide-eyed radicals on fire for the Lord.

Because the truth is, our God is a come-and-see sort of God. And the invitation to encounter is always on the table. Your discipleship story hinges on how you respond. But I can tell you, if you do, it is only the beginning.

Like Nathanael, you will see even greater things than this.

May it be so.

SONG OF FOCUS
"Come and See!"

WORDS: ED VARNUM; MUSIC: UNKNOWN; ARR. BY ED VARNUM

1. Can anything that's good come out of Naz'reth?
A place of country bumpkins most agree.
But sir, how would you know?
Look for yourself, come on let's go!
Philip made this invitation: "Come and see!"

Refrain:

**Come and see! (Come and see!)
Come and see! (Come and see!)
See for yourself this man from Galilee!
If you think there's nothing good
in disrespected neighborhoods,
how can you know for sure
until you come and see?**

2. Nathaniel had a preconceived opinion
'til Jesus said, "I saw you 'neath the tree."
"Sir, you are a prophet! If you let me, I will follow
and invite all who will listen, 'Come and see!'"

Refrain

3. Responding to the call to be disciples,
and seek to grow from where our faith may be,
a journey of discipleship in joy, faith,
hope, and love,
and on to even greater things,
we come and see.

Refrain

BROAD HEARTS BROAD MINDS BROAD REACH