

**Davidson College Presbyterian Church**  
**Davidson, North Carolina**  
**Rev. Claire George-Drumheller**  
**“Come and See”**  
**John 1:43-51**  
**Second Sunday after the Epiphany**  
**January 14, 2018**

*<sup>43</sup>The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, ‘Follow me.’ <sup>44</sup>Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. <sup>45</sup>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.’ <sup>46</sup>Nathanael said to him, ‘Can anything good come out of Nazareth?’ Philip said to him, ‘Come and see.’ <sup>47</sup>When Jesus saw Nathanael coming towards him, he said of him, ‘Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!’ <sup>48</sup>Nathanael asked him, ‘Where did you come to know me?’ Jesus answered, ‘I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.’ <sup>49</sup>Nathanael replied, ‘Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!’ <sup>50</sup>Jesus answered, ‘Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these.’ <sup>51</sup>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.’ John 1:43-51 (NRSV)*

I was able to spend the beginning of 2018 in a special way. John Ryan and I took a group of 18 students to the College Conference at Montreat the week before last.<sup>1</sup> The group was a combination of DCPC members who have graduated from high school and students at Davidson College, and let me tell you, we had a great experience.

On the last night of College Conference, over dinner, one of our DCPC students said to me, “I have a theological question for you... about predestination.” I know I may not be in the majority here, but I thought, “YES! A THEOLOGICAL QUESTION ABOUT PREDESTINATION!” Now, I was excited partly because of the topic, but even more than that, I was excited because it meant this student was thinking, exploring, and engaging her faith.

This sermon is not about predestination. So let me do a harsh gear shift here. You and I can have that conversation later if you like. But as is the case in theological conversations, that one question at College Conference led to the next question, and one topic led to the next, which led to the next. We discussed predestination as the good news that God is sovereign and that God is ultimately in control of our salvation. The question about predestination led eventually to the question of evangelism: if God is in control, what’s the point of evangelism? If our salvation is up to God, why even bother with telling people about God?

So we explored the question: why bother with evangelism? And here’s some of what we said: because God’s love is too good to keep to ourselves; because God can work through us to share God’s love with others; because faith is passed from person to person. Why bother with evangelism? Because beginning with Jesus, the Christian faith has been shared through a personal invitation: *come and see!* Evangelism is that invitation – an invitation to *come and see!*

*Come and see God’s bountiful gifts.*  
*Come and see God’s grace.*

*Come and see God's love.  
Come and see!*

One Presbyterian minister was famous for his special invitation. Yes, I'm talking about *the* Presbyterian minister, the one with the TV show, who looked into the camera, and in into the hearts and souls of children around the country, including mine, and invited us, "Won't you be my neighbor?" Mr. Rogers.

Fred Rogers was an ordained minister in the United Presbyterian Church, and his TV show, *Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood*, ran from 1968-2001. Every show, he invited children into lives of compassion, patience, and love with that simple question, "Won't you be my neighbor?"

Mr. Rogers was known for his cardigans and comfortable sneakers, but he was also a pioneer who challenged racial stereotypes. Francois Clemmons played a character on *Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood* for 25 years. It started when Fred heard Francois singing in church, and in 1968 Francois joined the cast as Officer Clemmons. That made Francois the first African-American with a recurring role on a kids' TV series, before *Captain Kangaroo* and before *Sesame Street*.

Francois Clemmons has told his story about being on *Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood* many times.<sup>2</sup> He recalled one scene in particular that they shot in 1969. Mr. Rogers had his feet resting in a kiddie pool filled with water on a hot day. Mr. Rogers said to Officer Clemmons, "Would you like to join me?"

Officer Clemmons accepted the invitation and put his feet in the pool with Mr. Rogers. This is how Francois remembered the scene: "The icon Fred Rogers, not only was showing my brown skin in the tub with his white skin as two friends, but as I was getting out of that tub he was helping me dry my feet... I think he was making a very strong statement."<sup>3</sup>

Fred Rogers *was* making a strong statement. It was a bold move in itself to cast an African-American as a police officer, and Francois was also gay. He came out to Mr. Rogers, and Mr. Rogers kept him on the show, which was rather radical for the 1960s. The kiddie pool scene Francois talked about was filmed in 1969. Martin Luther King, Jr., had been assassinated the year before. The whole country had seen images from Bloody Sunday, from voting rights demonstrations, and from sit-ins. Swimming pools in particular were famously segregated, and many protests took place around them. When this scene aired in 1969, it was on the five year anniversary of a wade-in protest in St. Augustine, Florida; several black and white protestors jumped into a segregated motel pool, and the owner poured acid into the water.<sup>4</sup>

Five years later, Mr. Rogers extended an invitation to Officer Clemmons and to Francois. On a hot day, with his feet in a cool pool of water, Mr. Rogers says to Officer Clemmons, "Would you like to join me?"

*This water is refreshing. Come and see.*

*Your skin is a different color, and your sexual orientation is different from mine, but you are my neighbor. Come and see.*

*Society's ways of segregation and intolerance are wrong. Come and see.*

Mr. Rogers, the Presbyterian minister, indicates to his friend Francois Clemmons, *I see the image of God in you. Come and see.*

The invitation to know God's love is passed from person to person; the Christian faith is passed from person to person with an invitation: *come and see!* We see that personal invitation in today's text. Jesus found Philip and gave him an invitation: "Follow me." Philip agreed straightaway and then told Nathanael about finding Jesus, the one promised by Moses in the Law and the prophets. Nathanael

perhaps shows a bit of skepticism: “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” he asks. And then here comes the next person-to-person invitation: Philip says to Nathanael, “*Come and see!*”

The discipleship model established here in John is following Jesus by going out. As soon as people are called in, they go out. Jesus said to Philip, “Follow me,” and the next reported action is Philip going out, finding Nathanael, and offering the invitation: “*come and see.*” Jesus says to Philip, “Follow me,” and Philip goes out and says to another, “*Come and see.*” Following Jesus means going out; following Jesus means inviting others;<sup>5</sup> following Jesus means...dare I say it?... evangelism!

We have to take note of the masterful witness of Philip. He doesn’t try to convince Nathanael; he doesn’t cajole him. Philip doesn’t even try to answer Nathanael’s question. Instead, Philip offers an invitation.<sup>6</sup>

*I’ve found the one I’ve been looking for –  
the one the scriptures have promised.  
I’m on a journey of faith,  
and I invite you to join with me.  
Come and see.*

We see this same pattern in John when Jesus encounters the Samaritan woman at the well. Jesus shocks the woman by taking a drink from her; he shocks the woman by knowing all about her. And the woman in turn runs into the city and tells the people, *Come and see!*<sup>7</sup>

*Come and see this man who knew all about me!  
He just might be the Messiah!*

The woman followed Jesus by going out -- by going out and offering that person-to-person invitation: *Come and see!*

Jesus invited Philip to experience God’s love in a new way. In turn, Philip invited Nathanael: “*Come and see!*” Since Jesus called to those first disciples, the Christian faith has been passed from person to person with an invitation like Philip’s: “*Come and see!*”

*Come and see God’s bountiful gifts.  
Come and see God’s love.  
Come and see God’s grace.  
Come and see!*

Back at College Conference, when we weren’t talking about the ins and outs of Reformed theology, we heard about stories of people who were following Jesus by offering that invitation, *come and see.* We heard from Rick Ufford-Chase, a former moderator of the PC(USA). Rick spent years in Arizona, where he worked to address human rights issues a faith issue. He is one of the founders of No More Deaths, an organization that works to eliminate deaths in the desert of people who are trying to cross from Mexico in the US. They put out water and welcome blankets. Rick knows a love from God that passes national identities, and so he followed Jesus by passing along that love:

*I love you;  
God loves you;  
come and see.*

We also heard from Becca Stevens, an Episcopalian priest who founded Thistle Farms. Thistle Farms works with women who are survivors of trafficking, prostitution, and addiction. Thistle Farms is a residential and restorative program; women live together, work together, and heal together. Becca

Stevens suffered abuse in her own life, but she knew that abuse, and the suffering and shame that came along with it, weren't God's plan for her. She started Thistle Farms as an invitation to women: *come and see!*

*Come and see healing.*

*Come and see support.*

*Come and see community.*

*Come and see God's love.*

Thistle Farms employs women in the program largely through their line of bath and beauty products called *Love Heals*. Because according to Becca Stevens, "love is the most powerful force for change in the world." *Come and see.*<sup>8</sup>

Becca and Thistle Farms started a global project at a refugee camp in Greece called *The Welcome Project*. When refugees flee, they leave all they have -- their possessions, their homes, their community; they leave all they have to don a life jacket and to swim to the possibility of safety. Through The Welcome Project, refugee women weave welcome mats that include fabric from these life vests worn on their flights out of war-torn countries. This program is called The Welcome Project because, as Becca Stevens says, "Love welcomes."<sup>9</sup> *Come and see!* All these items (the welcome mats and the Love Heals bath and beauty products) are available for purchase on their website. No, Thistle Farms is not sponsoring this sermon or this worship service. But they are being disciples by offering that person-to-person invitation: *come and see!*

*Come and see community!*

*Come and see God's love!*

*Come and see God's grace!*

*Come and see!*

Since Jesus' time, the Christian faith has been passed from person-to-person with an invitation: *come and see!* At Davidson College Presbyterian Church, we invite others to *come and see* in our mission and outreach and education. To college students who use our Student Center, we say, *come and see!* Some of these students are dedicated to the church, some have been hurt by the church, and others do not know the church at all. But to them all we say, *Come and see!*

*Come and see God's love through our hospitality!*

We invite youth to *come and see* through the confirmation journey. Many of our youth were baptized in this very church, raised in this very church. And through confirmation, pastors, small group leaders, and families invite these youth to *come and see*.

*Come and see this God who created us in God's own image.*

*Come and see God's endless love.*

*Come and see!*

We invite our neighbors at Room in the Inn to *come and see*. We know the love of God and the support of community, and we say to our neighbors, *come and see*.

*Come and see acceptance without judgment.*

*Come and see support.*

*Come and see hospitality through a warm bed and a home-cooked meal.*

*Come and see.*

When we gather at the Lord's Table, as we will today, we respond to the invitation -- the invitation to *come and see*.

*Come and see that the Lord is good.*

*Come and see Christ's body given for us.*

*Come and see God's love poured out for us;*

*Come and see nourishment at this table, so that we can go out and be  
Christ's body for the world.*

*Come and see!*

At College Conference, the students asked a very honest question. *Why bother with evangelism?* The word "evangelism" is the transliteration of the Greek word εὐαγγέλιον (*euangelion*). Translated, it means *good news*. Why evangelism? Because it's about God's good news. Why bother with evangelism? Because this good news is too good to keep to ourselves; God's love is too good to keep to ourselves. God's grace and peace are too good to keep to ourselves! Evangelism is that invitation. Evangelism is taking Philip's lead; evangelism is inviting others to *come and see* –

*to come and see this good news for themselves,*

*to come be a part of God's work in the world*

*and to see for yourself the grace of God.*

*Come and see.*

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.montreat.org/college/>

<sup>2</sup> This video was shown at the 9:45 service <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ObHNWh3F5fQ>

<sup>3</sup> Michael Garofalo and Jasmyn Belcher Morris, "462: In the Neighborhood," in *StoryCorps*, podcast accessed January 8, 2018 <https://storycorps.org/podcast/storycorps-462-in-the-neighborhood/>

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Hankins, Davis, "Exegetical Perspective" in *Feasting on the Gospels: John*, Vol. 1, eds. Cynthia A. Jarvis and E. Elizabeth Johnson (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), 38-43.

<sup>6</sup> Lettson, Raquel St. Clair, "Pastoral Perspective" in *Feasting on the Gospels: John*, Vol. 1, eds. Cynthia A. Jarvis and E. Elizabeth Johnson (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), 38-43.

<sup>7</sup> John 4:7-29

<sup>8</sup> <https://thistlefarms.org/pages/model-impact>

<sup>9</sup> <https://thistlefarms.org/pages/the-welcome-project>