

D.T. Niles
Go back after
communion

Come and See

A sermon preached by Ted Atkinson, Minister, Oxford Presbyterian Church, Oxford, PA on the second Sunday after Epiphany, January 17, 1988. Scripture Lessons: 1 Samuel 3:1-10; Psalm 63:1-8; 1 Corinthians 6:12-20; John 1:35-42.

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

One of my foremost concerns as a pastor is how to get people to deepen their commitment to Christ through His church. Our Gospel lesson for this morning gives us a glimpse of how Jesus got people to follow him. Maybe as we listen to this story we'll hear Jesus call us to deeper faith and obedience.

The scene opens on John the Baptist standing with two disciples. He points to Jesus saying, "Behold, the Lamb of God." The two disciples began to follow Jesus. All of us begin to follow Jesus because somebody at some time pointed us to him. That's why your heart is here this morning. But now the question is how to you grow as a Christian and deepen your faith and commitment to Christ through the church?

Our Gospel lessons suggests three ways to do. ^{his} *First, don't be afraid to question.* "I have a lot of questions about the Christian faith," one member recently told me. "I don't even know if I'm still a Christian." I felt like saying, "Thank God for questions!" because here ^{is} is a man who's done more thinking and reading about the Christian faith than most people who've never questioned. *He's a seeker and God is a rewarder of those who seek him.*

It's interesting that the first thing we hear Jesus say in the Gospel of John is a question, "What are you looking for?" This is a question that Jesus addresses to everyone who'd follow him. So often a deeper commitment to Jesus, through his church, begins with questions. These questions and doubts may disturb and frighten us. Friends may tell us that it's the devil who's raising the questions. But maybe the one who's raising the question is none other than God. He raises questions that goad us out

of our complacency until we begin to seek for answers.

When I was in high-school and college I had so many questions about God, the Bible and Jesus. I wondered if God even existed. I wondered if Jesus really rose from the dead. People would say of me at that time, "He's really searching" and I was. As I look back on that experience of questioning I see how it resulted in a deeper faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. *Christians who are searchers and seekers grow in their discipleship.* If you have questions and troubling doubts concerning the Christian faith let me suggest that you consider that maybe the source of those questions is Jesus. Consider the possibility that Jesus is raising these questions to get you to seek answers. This is one way we grow in our discipleship.

Secondly, we grow in our commitment to Jesus as Lord when we spend quality time with him and his people. After Jesus asked Andrew and his friend what they were looking for they responded by asking where he was staying. It's as though Andrew and his friend had so much to say that it couldn't all be said while they were standing there. "Where are you staying?" They were really saying, "I have a lot of questions to ask you. I want to learn more about you. I need to get to know you better. Are you willing to spend time with us?"

I think that one of the biggest obstacles to discipleship is the desire for instant answers to our problems. We come to God demanding instant solutions to our problems and when they aren't forthcoming we get discouraged and wonder if there's anything at all to the Christian faith. We come to church sporadically, perhaps only when a crisis comes up in our lives, hoping that we'll get relief. We come and hope that in one brief hour everything will fall in place for us and if it doesn't we become disillusioned and sometimes jaded in our attitude.

As I look back over my life as a Christian I can remember the details of very few sermons or Sunday School classes. Rather it's been the cumulative effect of all those Sunday School discussions and sermons and worship services. ^{and reflects a time of fellowship that deepened my commitment.} ~~It's been the cumulative time spent with fellow Christians searching for answers to questions, searching for what Jesus is leading us to do. Discipleship takes time. People begin to grow as Christians when they submit themselves to the discipline of going to church and Sunday School even when it doesn't seem to be doing anything for them. We grow as Christians as we abide in Christ and spend time with him and his people.~~

Third, perhaps the most effective way of growing as Christians is through personal involvement. Jesus said to Andrew and his friend, "Come and see!" I believe that Jim Sumner is going down to Central America in response to the invitation of Jesus to come and see. He's going to grow in his commitment to Christ as Lord as a result of that trip. I believe that when Laurie Winchester went to Malawi, Africa this past summer she was responding to the invitation of Jesus to come and see. Last summer Rich Woods and Dawn Hoffman went and saw and experienced something of what God is doing in our ^{among youth} Presbytery and Synod. In a few months the Murrays will be going to the Soviet Union in response to the invitation of Jesus to come and see. Several months ago ten of us went down to Wilmington to learn more about the Stephen's Ministry program. I believe we were responding to the invitation of Jesus to come and see. We grow in our Christian commitment through personal involvement in the work and witness of the church of Christ.

*From in M.L.
Treva's Place
Nancy Ashman
Ted & Kay*

Let me briefly summarize what I've been saying. I've been talking about how Jesus calls men and women to be his disciples. It begins when

someone points us to Jesus and we begin to follow. ^{It continues} Then Jesus raises ^{as we seek for answers to our questions} questions to make us restless until we seek for answers. Then as we spend time with Christ through participation in S.S., worship and fellowship and our commitment deepens. Finally, through personal involvement we respond to the invitation of Jesus to come and see ~~where he is~~ ^{in the church and in the world,} and what he's doing.

Let me close with telling you a true story of how Jesus ^{called some contemporary people} calls people ~~today~~ to be his disciples. Bill and Nancy Hardison moved from Delaware to Reedsville, PA about fifteen years ago when I was the pastor of a small church in Reedsville, PA. They had two little girls in elementary school. A neighbor, Lois Armor, a member of our church, had two boys the same age. She asked Bill and Nancy if she could take their children to SS. They said, "Yes." The girls came regularly and were given a Bible. The girls brought the Bible home and their dad said, "What do you have there?" "It's a Bible! We got it in Sunday School." "Let me see it," He said. It was a January afternoon and Bill thought he'd take a quick look at it before the football game. He opened the Bible and started to read in the Gospels. When he finished, the football game was over and it was dinner time. He was utterly fascinated by the Bible.

Bill was a math teacher. Our church had infiltrated the local school with a lot of teachers. The next day he went to work. One of the teachers said, "I think I have your daughter in Sunday School. Why don't you come and see what our church is like. I think you'd like it." Bill and Nancy came and saw. They started to come regularly. Next they became a member of a small group studying a book called the Edge of Adventure by Bruce Larson. It was obvious to me, through that class, that Bill was a real seeker. The next step was a Sunday School class where we studied the prophet Amos. ^{question raised about social justice.}

Then Bill and Nancy began attending a new members class. When they finally met with the session Bill said, "I want to join on reaffirmation of faith because I don't believe I really knew Jesus as Lord and Savior until I came and saw what was happening here." *The last 2 hard born of men were still growing in the Christian faith.*

For whatever reasons you've come this morning I hope that you'll hear the voice of Jesus inviting you to come and see. Through anthems, hymns, prayers, Scripture, Creed and sermon we hear the voice of Jesus inviting all of us... Come and see. And, if we *do* go then, we *do* see. That's the way God usually works. We don't really see until we go. We don't really understand until we believe and follow.

Let us pray :