

Come and See

A sermon preached by Ted Atkinson, Minister, Oxford Presbyterian Church, Oxford, PA on the 2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time, January 16, 1993. Scripture Lessons: 1 Samuel 3:1-10; Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18; 1 Corinthians 6:12-20; John 1:35-51.

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

Suppose a good friend comes to you and excitedly says, "I met a young man yesterday who has all the answers to the world problems. He has the answer to world hunger, to the energy shortage, to the national debt, to health care reform, to the Middle East problem, to the AIDS epidemic, to homelessness and poverty, to crime and violence. He's a thirty year old guy just up from Tijuana, Mexico. He's unemployed at the present time and he doesn't speak English real well. But this guy has the answer to all the world's problems."

Would you not say to your friend, "Tijuana? Did you say, Tijuana, Mexico?" We can understand Nathanael's skepticism when 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."

"Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"

I think Philip sensed that Nathanael had a point. Philip doesn't argue with Nathanael. He doesn't make a case for Nazareth. He doesn't get defensive. Instead he has the only practical answer that believers can ever give a skeptic: "Come and see for yourself. Let me show you what I've seen. Try it. You be the judge."

This is the most effective defense of the Gospel. "I've met Jesus Christ. I'm still learning about him. I'm trying to follow him the best I'm able. I believe he has the answers. I'm trying to get to know him better. I meet with some friends to

I don't have all the answers.

study the Bible, to pray, and to discuss how to apply the message of Jesus to our
our lives. I can't prove he's the Messiah. I can't even prove that God exists or that
Jesus rose from the dead. But come, join us and see for yourself."

When I was a minister in the Reedsville Presbyterian Church near State College, I invited some people to meet on Sunday evening to study a book entitled, "The Edge of Adventure" by Bruce Larson and Keith Miller. About ten people showed up, half of them weren't members. We went around the table introducing ourselves and telling what brought us there. When Dan's turn came he said, "The only reason I'm here is because of my wife." His wife, Jene, had just started attending the worship service. He went on, "I'm not religious. I don't even know if I believe in God. I'm just here because my wife asked me to come and see how it goes." At the end of that first session I invited everybody to close with a brief three or four word prayer like, "Thank you God." I said, "If anyone is uncomfortable with that just say, 'I pass'." That night when it came time for Dan to pray he said, "I pass." But Dan kept coming with his wife. He sat there, sometimes with a cynical smile, sometimes looking bored. But he kept coming. And near the end of that 13 week class he began to pray, "Lord, I don't know what I believe and I don't know who you are." Over the months he kept coming and eventually made a profession of faith in Jesus Christ. Several months ago I ran into him and his wife at a wedding in State College. He's now an elder in the Reedsville Presbyterian Church. He's the chairperson of the evangelism committee.

"Come and see," Philip said. One of the reasons I'm going to Israel is to see what's going on in the land where so much of Biblical history is focused. I want to

~~come and~~ see where Jesus was born. I want to ~~come and~~ see the Mount of Olives where Jesus prayed. I want to ~~come and~~ see where he was crucified. I want to ~~come and~~ see where he was buried and rose from the dead. I also want to ~~come and~~ see what the Risen Christ is doing today to bring reconciliation between Christians, Jews and Muslims in that divided land.

I have a friend who once stayed in a motel in a large city and was surprised to find, posted to the elevator door, a small, handwritten notice which read, "Party tonight! Room 210. 8:00 p.m. Everyone invited!" My friend, having nothing else to do, showed up at the room at 8:00 p.m. to find the door opened and all sorts of people in the room laughing and talking. Unfortunately, it was a practical joke. The person who was staying in that room knew nothing about the party and wasn't exactly prepared for one and was actually trying to get all these people out of her room. My friend said, "It reminded me of the church I use to go to. There was a sign out front that said, 'Everybody welcome'. But the members were always surprised and somewhat suspicious whenever somebody new showed up - especially if they were a different color - or looked or dressed differently - or raised a lot of uncomfortable questions nobody could answer."

He has a point. Maybe our church should have a giant flashing neon sign on top of the steeple with the words, "Come and see". This is God's house, not ours. Jesus invites us to his house, to his place. Jesus invites everyone to come and see. That's good news - it doesn't make any difference who we are or what motivates us to come - some may come, seeking, out of boredom, or loneliness, or curiosity, or responsibility, or eagerness to be in fellowship with others, or simply out of a

desire to come and see what's happening. When that happens it's important for us to welcome them and ^{show them} ~~pray that they~~ see the Risen Christ in action.

Let us pray: Gracious God, we have come and we have seen that Jesus is the Christ. Enable us to be so filled with your Spirit that we will not hesitate to invite all our friends and neighbors to come and see what the Risen Christ is doing. And open our own eyes wide to see more clearly what you want us to do as your followers. Through Christ our Lord we pray. Amen.

The opening is a revision of Lewis Smedes, How Can It Be All Right When Everything Is All Wrong?, page 123. The closing story about the invitation to a party in a motel is a revision from Thomas G. Long, Shepherds and Bathrobes, pages 68-69.

A family of Christians
dedicated to proclaiming
the unconditional love
and leadership of
Jesus Christ to the
local and world
community