**Come and See God is Working**

January 17 2020 John 1:43-51, 1 Sam 3:1-10

Come is such a wonderful word, it is an invitation which encompasses welcome, there is openness in the word, vulnerability. It evokes images of grandparents down on their haunches greeting a young grandchild, or a star-struck adolescent being invited to hug their hero, a new teacher coaxing an anxious child to enter the classroom or a treasured dog bounding over the grass towards their owner.

As Jesus calls his first followers we often recall them being called in the words “follow me” this happens regularly in the synoptic gospels, (Matthew, Mark and Luke). However in John’s gospel the phrase *“come and see”* is also used. In fact the word come is used regularly by Jesus,

*“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest”[[1]](#footnote-1)*

“Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink”[[2]](#footnote-2) “*come to me to have life*”[[3]](#footnote-3)

“Whoever comes to me will never be hungry”.[[4]](#footnote-4)

**Come and see**

Today we look particularly at the call of Nathanael. Nathanael presents as a man with questions, doubts and wonderings regarding Jesus, yet when Philip suggested that he *“come and see”* what Jesus is really like, what he is saying, what he is doing, Nathanael agrees. Earlier in the chapter, Jesus had encouraged Andrew to *“come and see”* and in the process he concluded that Jesus was the Messiah. Nathanael’s response to Philip’s*, ‘come and see’* indicates some initial openness to encountering Jesus.

Jesus often answers questions in a way that encourages the person to come and discover the truth for themselves.[[5]](#footnote-5) His mode of teaching his disciples followed a common pattern of the day. Using something like an apprenticeship model his disciples lived with him, *travelling with him*, observed him daily, what he did, *what he said* the attitudes he conveyed.

Like family members they were given the opportunity to find out for themselves, who Jesus really was and what he had come to do. They were eye-witnesses of this amazing demonstration of what God was like.

The first chapter of John, from which this story about Nathanael comes, contains an amazing array of titles for Jesus, Son of God, light, Word, Teacher, Messiah, Lamb of God, King of Israel. It reminds us *“not to limit Jesus to preconceived categories and expectations but to keep one’s eyes open for a surprising revelation of God”.[[6]](#footnote-6)* It reminds us that, we too are offered the opportunity, to find out for ourselves how Jesus may respond to our questions, doubts and wonderings.

Nathanael was confronted by Jesus supernatural knowledge of him. No doubt astounded Nathanael asked, *“how do you know me?”* [[7]](#footnote-7) This personal knowledge of him formed a basis on which Nathanael concluded “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!”[[8]](#footnote-8) Israel lived with the understanding that God knew them through and through, hence we have a psalm like the one with which we began our worship today. *“all my thoughts lie open to your gaze”* “before a word is on my tongue, Lord, you have known its meaning through and through” “there is nowhere on earth I can escape you” “*you created me and shaped me*” We are offered the gift of being real about who we are with God. There is little point in seeking to conceal anything. We can rejoice that God knows all about us and still reaches out in love and grace and says “*Come*” “*Come and see what I am doing*”.

**I am already active**

Philip took the initiative to invite his friend Nathanael to come and see Jesus, yet even before this Jesus was active.

When Nathanael approaches Jesus, Jesus takes the initiative, he begins the interaction and he tailors his comments, his approach uniquely to Nathanael. He highlights Nathanael’s character and national pride, *“Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit”.[[9]](#footnote-9)* Throughout the gospels we see Jesus doing this. He never has a *“one size fits all”* approach. He engages meaningfully with each individual, tuning in to their needs and their background. The various ways in which he engages with people reveals a wide variety of aspects of the character of God.

Jesus revelation to Nathanael regarding his previous activity, *“under the fig tree”* reinforces that Jesus is actively interested in him even before Nathanael is aware of that, Jesus is pro-active in “finding” Nathanael. Philip is acting as Jesus agent, but the initiative in seeking Nathanael rests wholly with Jesus. Jesus was at work long before Nathanael was aware of it.

Jesus’ supernatural knowledge of Nathanael confronts him. In encountering Jesus who we really are is uncovered. Nathanael also realises for himself who Jesus really is. *“Rabbi you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!”[[10]](#footnote-10)*

An encounter with God can be confusing, overwhelming even frightening. We read today of the boy Samuel’s encounter with God, with his initial confusion regarding what was happening, then his willingness to hear. If we had read on we would have seen that the message God had for him was not pleasant and he was then faced with the challenge of sharing this message with Eli. However, God was working here. Before Samuel understands it, before he is ready to respond, God is working, God is calling, and Samuel is enabled to respond.

Sometimes we lay a heavy burden upon ourselves regarding the work of God’s kingdom, when we should be recognising more of the ways in which God is already at work. The church is God’s church not our church. God has not given up on God’s church. God has always been active maintaining and extending the community of faith over the ages. We get the opportunity to work with God in the work of God.

We have been talking often recently about our responsiveness to God but that is only possible because God is active drawing us in, reaching out to us first.

Our uniqueness creates unique needs and gifts in each of us, Jesus responds to our individuality revealing himself to us personally and affirming that we are unique loved children of God. Epiphany reminds us that God is revealing God’s self to the world in a wide variety of ways, connecting with the uniqueness that is imbedded in each individual.

**Bringing Heaven and earth together**

After Nathanael realises who Jesus is, Jesus begins teaching him. Jesus wants him to realise that *“Jesus supernatural knowledge of the past or the present, while impressive, is not the most important reason for believing in him.”[[11]](#footnote-11)* Nathanael is at the beginning of his faith journey with Jesus, he will see greater things as time goes by and these things can cause his faith to deepen.

The picture that is painted for Nathanael of heaven opened and angles moving between heaven and earth is a dramatic picture particularly in our times. However we read of angelic activity from before the birth of Jesus and throughout his life. This activity reminds us of the constant interaction between Jesus and God the Father during his time on earth. It reminds us again of the cosmic significance of Jesus. Jesus bridges the distance between heaven and earth.[[12]](#footnote-12) We are reminded that “*as soon as Jesus appears there are at work in everyday life higher powers which, from time to time, break though into the open.”[[13]](#footnote-13)*

Whether it be through a dramatic vision of God at work, through hearing God speak to us personally and very clearly or through the process of coming and exploring what Jesus is like, God is at work. We are invited to come to God, ready to be surprised, knowing we are welcome, willing to work together with God and responding in worship of our God.

1. Matthew 11:28 NRSV [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. John 7:37b NIV [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. John 5:40b NRSV [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. John 6:35b NRSV [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Matthew 16:15, 11:3, [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Gail R. O’Day, “The Gospel of John: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections” in Leander E. Keck, *The New Interpreters Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes,* (Nashville, Tenessee: Abingdon Press, 1995) 533 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. John1:48 NIV [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. John1:49 NRSV [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. John 1:47 NRSV [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. John1:49 NRSV [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. J. Michael Ramsay, *The Gospel of John: The New International Commentary on the New Testament,* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2010) 133 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. O’Day, “The Gospel of John” 532 [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary,* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971) 106 [↑](#footnote-ref-13)