

John 1: 35-51
"MapQuest"
April 29, 2017
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Our family vacationed many summers near Moosehead Lake in the Northwoods of Maine. The deep glacier-built lakes and ponds are like glass. Candace's Father lived on a piece of land in a cabin that was a remarkable getaway – cut off from cell reception – which, I'll admit, at first, was a panic inducing, pulse quickening awakening for me – however, over time, it was something I looked forward to – like Rev. Wright mentioned last week with regard to John the Baptizer – it was living off the grid – away from constant contact and communication overload.

We grew to love our time spent there as time for fishing and hiking in the pristine environ of this region once roamed by people like Henry David Thoreau. One of our favorite pastimes was skipping rocks and throwing pebbles into the pond behind my father-in-law's home.

The water was so still and deep that when the rock hit the surface – it would ripple out with ever widening circles.

Like stones thrown into a pond sending ripples across the water's surface, the things we say – how we live our lives has a way of rippling throughout the lives of the people we encounter.

One of the great characteristics of the first disciples, the first followers of Christ, was their ripple effect. Something wonderful had happened to them and they couldn't contain it.

Jesus the Christ – the Messiah – the Anointed One – the One they had been waiting for – the one John the Baptizer had called "the Lamb of God who takes away the world's sin" – the One of whom John's Gospel prologue declared was "the Word made flesh which lived among us" – the One of whom Eugene Peterson translated that verse as "the Word became flesh & blood and moved into the neighborhood" –

This Jesus called to them and they were filled with expectant joy – so much so – they couldn't contain it. They had to share it. They could not sit still. It was contagious. They had to tell others and the circle of Christ's followers grows wider and wider and wider as the ripples of grace continue to spread outward to today.

This call narrative of the first disciples in John's Gospel contains a dynamic that exudes excitement, anticipation, expectancy and wonderment! William Barclay, declares of this passage, "...never was there a passage that contained so many little revealing touches than this...Touches that tell and frame for us the wonderment of God that reveals a love that yearns for relationship with us."

It begins with John the Baptizer with two of his disciples and when Jesus' passes by John calls out "Look, here is the Lamb of God!" These two disciples are probably wondering why their

Rabbi is so excited and they begin to follow Jesus. We might pause here to remind ourselves that what John the Baptist is doing is making good on what he said he was sent to do earlier in 1:7, "...he [John] came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him."

Two Quick side-notes:

1. *John's Jesus is often speaking to both the characters in the story AND the readers (the people who come after 1st century disciples) ~ for instance, in v. 51 when Jesus responds to Nathanael "...I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man." it is 2nd person plural – the equivalent of you all – indicating the gospel writer is addressing both 1st century disciples and those who will come after.*
2. *Often in John's gospel there are two levels of meaning occurring – there is the natural meaning that goes with the flow of the storyline and the metaphorical meaning/lesson for discipleship. For instance, these two disciples hearing John declare Jesus "the Lamb of God" ~ what do they do?... 'they followed him' – that is natural progression of the story – however, the metaphorical/teaching aspect is how this is in essence what the whole of John's Gospel seeks to ask (what does it mean to follow Jesus). We might think of it as two parallel tracks running simultaneously.*

This is how John's gospel begins Jesus' ministry.

The very first words of John's Jesus come in the form of a question, "What are you looking for?" Recalling the parallel tracks, this question makes sense in the storyline – Jesus turns, sees these two following him like a couple of first century paparazzi (sans cell phones and digital cameras to capture the perfect selfie) and he naturally asks, "What are you looking for?" It is also asking one of the central questions of John's Gospel, "What is it that people seek when they follow Jesus?"

John speaks / the two disciples follow / Jesus turns and asks a question "What are you looking for?" / the two disciples respond, "Where are you staying?" ...it's a bit of a random question.

A question we'll dissect on two levels:

First, it is once again a parallel track storyline – it follows the natural framework of the unfolding scene and it also plays into a bigger storyline.

The two disciples' response *Where are you staying* to Jesus' question sounds like it could be a natural part of the story's plotline.

The second meaning within John's Gospel is how the word "to stay" (meno in Greek) is used elsewhere in the Fourth Gospel. It asserts the relationship of God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit to one another and those who believe. (Consider last Sunday's text 1:32-33, "And John testified, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it **remained** on him [Jesus]. I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and **remain** is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.'" It carries a sense of permanence – this is not transitional or sporadic housing.

This prompts a **Second** level to understanding their question. They are asking the deeper question, "Where do you abide?" *Abide* is the key for it conveys permanence the abiding God of the Old Testament was the God that set up tent.

To understand this, we need go back to John 1:14, "The Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of the father's only Son, full of grace and truth." John's audience – a mostly Jewish audience – would have heard this as "The Word became flesh and tabernacled among us..."

This would prompt their communal memory to recall the Exodus story of their Israelite forebears who fled Egypt's bondage and their wilderness wanderings.

They were instructed to build the tabernacle which was a portable tent of worship – the tabernacle was the visible place – the recognizable spot where God resided within their community. The Lord's glory descended and rested over the Holy of Holies – the place where the Ark of the Covenant resided – by day it was visible in a cloud of smoke and at night a pillar of fire – the tabernacle was set up in the center of their caravan – and all the remaining tribes would set up tents around the perimeter – so that they could look to the center of their encampment and see God.

The routine was if the cloud of smoke or pillar of fire stopped, then they stopped and set up camp. When it moved they broke camp and followed until it stopped then they set up new camp.

John's listeners upon hearing these opening words "The Word became flesh and lived [tabernacled] among us..." would recognize the writer declaring Jesus to be the living embodiment of God in their midst – Emmanuel as the birth narrative puts it "God with us." When this Jesus moves we move – when Jesus rests we rest – where Jesus goes we go.

In this Jesus, perhaps these two disciples are catching a glimpse of the companionship and direction of Almighty God – perhaps they see in Jesus the one in whom *we have seen the glory of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.*

When the two disciples take off after Jesus, perhaps they were looking for something lasting, something worthy of their trust and faith in an unstable world...maybe they wanted to know Jesus' take on world affairs & faithful responses to such affairs?

Or, I wonder, perhaps most of all...they were looking for God's presence in their life and something about this Jesus caught their attention and they are beginning to sense that if they can abide where this Jesus abides that they won't have to look for God anymore – maybe they have found God in the flesh right there with them.

"Rabbi," they said to him, "where are you staying?"

"Teacher, let us join you and be your students."

And Jesus responds, "Come and See."

Again, you recall the Fourth Gospel's parallel track storylines:
"Where are you staying?" is the question the two disciples ask Jesus.
"Come and see," is Jesus' response – sounds like a natural answer.

However, it also holds a second level understanding in Jesus' non-direct answer.
Instead of giving an address they could type into Google maps, Jesus issues an invitation which will allow them to discover the answer for themselves.

In so doing, John's Jesus invites these two disciples and the readers of this encounter (that's you and me) to "come and see" – it's an offer to see Jesus with the eyes of faith.
One of the subtexts or subtweets within the Johannine Gospel is the counter to "worldly vision." It takes a modern proverb and flips it upside down. One of our New Testament professors, Dr. Kelley, taught us the following about John's gospel,

The world says, 'seeing is believing'
Faith says, 'believing is seeing.'

(Feel free to tweet that one out there if you want 😊.)

Where do you live?
Where do you reside?
Who lives there with you?

Jesus says, "Oh, I could tell you exactly where I live – however, it'll probably make more sense if you check it out for yourself. So, come and see."

These two disciples of John the Baptizer do just that, and so begins their vocation as disciples.

Come and see is an invitation to observe Jesus up close.

It's a call to share in his life and to entrust one's whole life to the promise that this Jesus is the Messiah, the Savior of the World.

Come and see is an invitation to living a full life.

It is a call to personal transformation – an adventure so wonderful that we cannot avoid being changed by the encounter.

What I love about this call narrative is that Jesus never said, "you've got to have your act together before I'll bring you on this journey."

Jesus never said to the disciples you've got to score a 90% or higher on the proficiency exam before I'll deem you worthy of this calling.

He simply said, "Come and see."

...Come and experience...Come and perceive...Come and understand...Come and wonder...Come and **become** who it is God knows you can become.

Perhaps this is what discipleship entails, developing the ability to keep our eyes open to what Jesus is doing and what He is calling us to do in this world.

Each child, each adult, no matter our age or stage in life is called to follow – to come and see.

Each of us is also called to be real in this endeavor.

Each of us is encouraged by the first disciples who were willing to admit their complacency and our doubt.

Can we really be the ones on which you are building your church?

Are we ready for the task to which you call us?

Do our efforts have any effect, whatsoever, given the reality of despair and grief in our world, and in our hearts?

At the core of our being, we admit to being haunted, sometimes by Nathanael's question, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"

Can anything good come from believing in Jesus Christ?

Are the stories really true? Are you real? Are you there? Are you who you say you are.?

In this cacophony of questions, the answer is simple & profound... "Come and See."

Come and wonder.

Come and abide with me.

Jesus is okay with honest faith that sometimes has questions.

Look at how he responds to Nathanael – it is the longest conversation between Jesus and a disciple in chapter 1 – and Jesus reveals the most about himself to the one who expressed skepticism and doubt.

And out of this encounter, Nathanael makes a foundational confession of faith. "You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"

(Keep this encounter in mind when we get to chapter 20 and Jesus' interaction with Thomas.)

We hit questioning moments of faith – and we wrestle with God in those moments – and when we emerge our faith is founded on more solid footing.

And Jesus promises to Nathanael and to us that as we join in the journey we will see greater things than we could ever imagine – it's Jesus way of saying, "You ain't seen nothing yet."

This Jesus of whom Nathanael calls "Son of God" describes himself as "the Son of Man" implying that Jesus is the place where the earthly & heavenly; the divine & human; the temporal & eternal meet.

Jesus is the locus of God's activity on earth.

Our job, as we journey together – with Christ and each other – is to bring others along as we become part of those grace ripples in this world.

Amen & Amen.