

“Come and See”

When an artist is faced with a blank canvas, or a woodcarver sees a block of wood; they look beyond the blankness or the block to see the end project; the beauty that lies within the blankness or the block. Not all of us can see that, some of us have to wait for the picture or the carving to start to take shape before we can see what it is supposed to be.

In the short story, The Bell Stand, a woodcarver has carved a beautiful Bell stand and the carver is asked how he came to do this incredible carving, and in part he says:

“Then I went to the forest to see the trees...

When the right tree appeared before my eyes the bell stand also appeared in it; clearly, beyond doubt.

All I had to do was to put forth my hand and begin.”

Wouldn't it be wonderful if all of us could have such clear insight, to see that thing of beauty before our eyes, to recognise it beyond doubt and to simply put forth our hand and begin.

Sometimes we cannot see what is right in front of us because we are caught up in what our **perceptions** are telling us. Sometimes we cannot see the object of beauty before us. Sometimes we can't even see Jesus because we ascribe to the idea that seeing is believing we won't believe without seeing Jesus face to face. In our day and age, when it comes to Jesus or God, we are asked to **believe first and in that believing** we will in turn see Jesus and ultimately God in everything in our lives.

The unfortunate reality for so many people is that they don't like entire groups of people because of how one person treated them; or a perception they have about other people's religion or colour or food. This is an ancient story told over and over again, **“What good can come from Nazareth”?** Nathaniel asked. Today, the same question might be, What good can come from India; what good can come from black people; what good can come from a reserve? What good can come from a Christian, an Arab, a Sikh. The list goes on and on and on, a different list for each one of us, our own personal list with our own personal biases.

Nathaniel was not the first to say it and he certainly was not the last but the lesson for us today is to place ourselves in the story and to ask ourselves some very difficult questions. **Are these our words? Is this our attitude when we hear about someone who seems different from us?**

Certainly today, as I stand before you for the first time in our ministry together; some of you may look at me and say, “what good can come from...and fill in your own ideas about appearance or sermon content or gender or orientation or background and your list may include more.”

Of course my start date was chosen before I knew what the scripture for today would be and I was once again delighted by God's intervention in everyday life. How appropriate to have this first scripture we would share be about a stranger in the midst of a community already established and the questions and curiosity of that community to trust that stranger to be the leader, the friend, the confidant, the one they are looking for to walk with them on their spiritual path.

What good can come from Nazareth, asks Nathaniel? **Nazareth was not the place of rulers and kings, the leaders of ancient times**; it was merely the working class and poverty stricken. How could our messiah come from there!

Phillip replies, **come and see.**

Ah, now here it is, **the invitation**, not given by Jesus directly as we always think of when we think of the calling of the disciples, but given by Phillip...one who has witnessed Jesus and who now believes. **Come and see.** This is just as important a statement as those made by Jesus himself. In fact, it is what links us today to this scripture and to Jesus. **Come and see my friend; see what I have seen, witness what I have witnessed**, see what Jesus can do for you. See how Jesus has changed my life and can change yours too!

In some way Phillip is asking Nathaniel to look past the exterior of what he *thinks* he knows so Nathaniel too will believe. An invitation to discipleship offered by Phillip to Nathaniel, an invitation to come and see and believe. Nathaniel is still not convinced even when Jesus says, **"Here, is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!"** In other words Jesus us saying **"Hey, I know you, and you are not going to pull any punches."** Nathaniel voices his doubt, **"Where did you get to know me?"** Today's scripture tells us Jesus answers him with, **"I saw you under the fig tree before Phillip called you"**, an intimate detail Jesus could not have known about him and so he believes. But it doesn't stop here! **Nathaniel then proclaims Jesus to be the Son of God; the King of Israel!** Like another famous Biblical doubter, **Nathaniel now proclaims Jesus, the one they have been waiting for!**

Jesus' response is just wait; now that you trust me and believe, just wait until you see what is to come; **the miracles, the lessons, the wonders of God**, revealed to you everywhere you turn; **you will see them now because you believe. Believe in what you cannot see in order to see unbelievable things. Believe in what you cannot see in order to see unbelievable things.** This is the mystery of our faith; this is the opportunity we are given when we are invited into discipleship. **Come and see**; and once we have seen we turn to others and we say come and see and then they turn to others and say come and see...

This is the responsibility given to us by God, through Jesus...come and see. In John's gospel he refers to it as the word made flesh. In the beginning was the word and the word was with God. And the Word became flesh and lived among us; and continues to

live among us through us. Once you have become a disciple of Jesus you see the world differently. You will see things that others may not see; you will see God in the face of the stranger beside you, in the lab tech taking your blood, in the clerk at the grocery store, even in the East Indian person you can hardly understand or the foreigner you once thought was only here to take your job.

Being a disciple of Jesus requires us to change our way of viewing our world; **to see the way Jesus sees the world**; to view our friends and neighbours and strangers through the eyes of **love and grace**; to come to the forest to see the trees but to see the beauty within each tree clearly and without doubt...**all we have to do is to put forth our hands and begin. Here I am Lord, Is it I Lord?**

Come and see...

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