

2023 Summer Sermons

June 18th - “Come and See” - John 1:35-51 - God’s eternal and generous welcome and on-going invitation to come join Him and see what he is up to!

This summer we are on a metaphorical pilgrimage with Jesus in our sermon series. I can imagine that many of us will plan vacations involving travel this summer. But a pilgrimage is a special kind of travel/journey. A pilgrim is more than a tourist and a pilgrimage is more than a journey. A pilgrim travels with a spiritual purpose, expecting that the travel and the pilgrim’s planned destination will help he or she grow closer to God.

Although Pilgrimages vary depending on the pilgrim, the destination and the route taken, still every pilgrimage begins with a beginning. Often before one step is taken there are days, maybe even years of preparation. You are driven forward with a hope, a vision, an expectation that the journey will be life-changing and the destination will be worth it all. Learning from those who have gone before you, you anticipate struggle with blisters, weariness, irritation with traveling partners, doubts and fears, the temptation to give up and give in to your frailties. But the transformative power of the travel and your anticipated destination give you the will to set out and begin the walk.

As we journey with Jesus on pilgrimage this summer through events in the Gospels, we anticipate it will be worth it. It is possible that this the journey will be life-changing. That depends to a great part on us!

We begin our journey where those whom Jesus called his disciples did. Last week Chris began somewhat after the beginning. Peter, Andrew, James and John had already had encounters with Jesus when he called them to follow him and become fishers of men. When he called them up and left fathers and boats to follow Jesus. Maybe that seems abrupt to you and it would have been, but this week’s event is the prequel which sets their following of Jesus into the context of their lives!

Read: John 1:35-51. This is the Word of the Lord.

His first disciples begin by seeing him from afar, being told something about him that they want to check out personally, curious about who he is. They are encouraged by their friend and mentor John the Baptizer.

This was at least the second time John had spoken to them about Jesus telling them that this man Jesus, was the Son of God, the Lamb of God. When they hear these provocative words, they leave John and start following Jesus - curious and maybe longing to see for themselves what John had proclaimed. When Jesus senses he is being watched and followed, he turns to these two and asks what they want.

Caught in the act, Andrew and his no-name friend quickly asks, “Where do you live?” Jesus doesn’t answer them with words or a description or a street address like we might, but instead invites them into an experiential answer with the words “Come and See.” This invitation has a low bar for personal involvement - just join me for awhile, check me out, see if this looks likely to lead to something bigger and better. No commitment is involved, just come and see. They stay the day with Jesus. At the end of the day Andrew seems certain he has found someone exceptional and invites his brother Peter to come and see as well. Don’t you wonder what took place between Andrew,

Jesus and the no-name friend as they spent the day together? What words were spoken, what questions were asked and answered, did Jesus do something that convinced Andrew that John the Baptizer was right?

“Come and See” says Jesus. Later in the reading Phillip uses the same phrase to invite Nathaniel to come and see. A Simple invitation from a generous man will change all their lives. Come...move towards me, a powerful word of inclusion, acceptance, welcome. Christ responds to our curiosity and hunger for real life with an invitation to come and see as well, to make it personal and experiential not theoretical.

To be invited to come is an act of generous hospitality, join me, be with me, see, taste, enter in.

Think about the first time you remember hearing about this Jesus. Did curiosity or need entice you to come and see? I remember the first invitation I felt. It was to take that invitation off of the flannel board story of Jesus I was listening to and bring him into my experience. A sweet after school Bible club leader was telling the story of Jesus and the invitation was to come to him - a decision that has woven its way through my life in such good ways. Wouldn't it be good and refreshing and encouraging if we all could tell our stories of coming to see Him?

Going back to the story of Jesus - There are all kinds of people who came to see - Andrew and Peter, James and John, Phillip and Nathaniel and all the others followed all the way to the cross in their pilgrimage with Jesus. All came to see. Future invitations from Jesus will ask for more - Come follow me and I will make you friseurs of men...come walk on the water Peter (Matt. 14:28-29,) come away with me for a rest (Mark 6:31), come take up your cross and follow me, Come put your hand in my wounds.

The disciples were on pilgrimage with Jesus - Coming, Seeing, Believing, Becoming through those three years and beyond. They were changed men and women.

So some like the disciples responded whole-heartedly to His invitation but many also turned back along the way because of doubts, fears, fatigue, unbelief, taking offense at the audacity of His claims and resistant to the challenge he presented and what the pilgrimage required.

Some of those folks stayed hostile, some remained on the fringes, curious maybe but uncommitted. Or perhaps some were too burdened by the cares of life to even notice Him. Some came close to get the blessings but wanted no part of the pilgrimage - after all he made it pretty clear that this pilgrimage would be difficult. He was honest about the journey - I have no home, no bed, no place to lay my head. You will experience trouble, but take heart I have overcome the world.

It is one of the great sadnesses of our culture that we are so committed to our own comfort and having our expectations and demands met that we often balk at the prospect of discomfort or laying aside our prerogatives to endure the challenges of life-long pilgrimage. But can we expect less of our pilgrimage through life if we are following Jesus? We follow the one who laid aside His equality with God in order to take on the life of a servant and become a man and die on a cross. That is an impossible life to follow in one sense and we are bound to blow it from time to time! Yet here is the great good news - even though we may stumble and fall, despite our personal squeamishness with discomfort, our flakiness and inconsistency to our commitments, Jesus still continually gives us the invitation to come and see, spend time with him and discover that He is the One worth following.

Andrew and Peter as well as the others came, saw, believed and became through their pilgrimage with Jesus. That is a good guide for us as well. Many of us have come and seen and believed. It's in the becoming where the adventure lies. Becoming is the life-long process of being shaped in the inner person to be like Jesus - mind, emotions, values, relationships - heart, soul, body and spirit. And that takes time in His presence.

And the invitation to come and see isn't a one-time invitation. It becomes the posture of the Christ-follower's life - always approaching Jesus, always welcomed by Him to come and see and bring others to see Him as well. We will find as they disciples did the invitation to come is greatly expanded on the journey during our pilgrimage with Him just as it was for the first disciples - come to take up our crosses, to walk on the troubled waters of life, to bring our brothers and sisters, and children and friends and neighbors - to be fishers of men as we heard last week. Maybe we could write our names in the text as the friend of Andrew un-named but also invited. We can be that one who spends a day with Jesus and is sure this is one worth following.

Here we are today - at the beginning of a pilgrimage. The psalmist says in Psalm 84 one of the songs of ascent that were sung on the pilgrimage to Jerusalem,

“Blessed are those whose strength is in you, who have set their hearts on pilgrimage.” the psalmist indicates two very helpful things to know as a pilgrim: - the secrets as it were:

First, the pilgrim's strength for making a pilgrimage is not in him or herself, but in the God who invites...the one who says Come and See. He provides His Holy Spirit to lead us, teach us, correct us, encourage us, comfort us, give us staying power.

Second, The pilgrim's part is to “set his or her heart on pilgrimage” - what does that mean? I have some ideas but certainly not a recipe to follow nor in fact all there is to know...only some thoughts. But maybe these ideas will spark some of your own.

I think it means that we must accept that this world is not our home.

It is learning to travel light - packing only the necessities and trusting God to provide the rest...

Getting rid of the baggage that comes with accumulating guilt and shame and and the stuff we own which now owns us.

It is certainly keeping heaven in our sights, Jesus our north star by which we chart the path.

And It certainly means setting our hearts on change - accepting it, anticipating it, welcoming it for our good and God's glory. This is what transformation requires.

Pilgrimage is a divine paradox - it is all about God and it is all about us.

Are we ready to be pilgrims? If so, let's buckle up!! Next week we will take a look at the road map for the journey. Wise travelers know something of the road before them. They have some familiarity with the route to take, so we pray...

“Blessed are we who find our strength in the Lord and have set our hearts on pilgrimage.” Lord, I have set my heart on pilgrimage. I will trust in your strength and path. Amen