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Title: Invitation to See

Date: January 13 & 14, 2018

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Scripture: [Psalm 66:1-5a, 16](#)

Text: [John 1:43-51](#)

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Day by day they arrive in your mail or inbox, on Facebook or Instagram. Invitations. A store is having a special Martin Luther King Day sale and you're invited to see their bargains. A friend is getting married and you are invited to see their ceremony. A restaurant has new menu items and you are invited to see how good they taste. Your class is

having a reunion and you are invited to see old friends. You received a number of invitations this week, some were advertisements, others were personal. All are an invitation to see. The most personal invitation to see is an invitation to discipleship; an invitation to come and see the power of Jesus.

This invitation, offered with three simple words, "come and see" defines the story of Jesus as told by John. Whether the words are offered by Jesus or by others, it implies a question and response. What do you see and how will you respond? How you answer the question depends on whether you see something or nothing.

Fresh off his baptismal experience, Jesus is the first to offer an invitation to see. He walks by John the Baptist and some of John's disciples. John had followers just the way Jesus had followers. John says, "That's the one I told you about, the Lamb of God." Two disciples decide to follow him and when Jesus senses that he is being followed, he turns around and asks, "What are you looking for?" They said to him, "Rabbi...where are you staying?" He said to them, "Come and see." (John 1: 38-39a) They did and they spent the day with Jesus. One of the two was Andrew. He was so excited about what he experienced and saw that he couldn't wait to offer his own invitation to see. He goes to his brother Peter and says, "We have found the Messiah." Come and see. He does, and his life is changed. Andrew becomes a disciple and his brother Peter follows. Jesus' team numbers two.

The next day, Jesus is ready to launch his ministry in Galilee. So, he invites another to join Andrew and Simon Peter in a life of discipleship. The

invitation is more straight forward. To Philip he simply says, "Follow me." Why not "come and see?" Perhaps it is because Philip had already heard that invitation. Some think that he was the other disciple with Andrew who spent the previous day with Jesus.

That makes sense because clearly he is all in, so excited about Jesus that he doesn't even say yes. He just rushes off to find his best friend and offer him an invitation to see. Philip says to Nathanael "We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth." (John 1:44) Philip couldn't wait to tell his friend the good news.

Isn't this what we do? When you have good news, you share it with your friends. If you get a new job or find out you are pregnant, you tell your friends. When your kids get picked for the team, when your spouse wins an award, when you publish a book, or sign the biggest contract in your lifetime, you share good news with friends. We even do it when we see a great movie or try a new restaurant. "I've got to tell you about this new steak house we ate at." This is who we are and what we do. You want your friends to know. It is a natural thing to do.

For some reasons, when the news is spiritual, things get a little weird. When the good news is the love of God in Christ Jesus, too often we become a little uncomfortable or tentative or even apologetic about sharing good news. It's odd. We never say to a friend, "I know this is awkward and I don't want to pressure you or anything and you may already know this but....there is this great new restaurant that you might want to try. I don't want to be presumptuous or step over a line. You may not even believe in restaurants. That's okay, too. But I just thought maybe you might, I don't know, like to try this restaurant."¹

There is none of that with Philip. He simply shares his good news with his friend, believing that his friend will be glad to hear about it. Sharing good news is ultimately an expression of love for a friend. You want them to know what you know and for Philip it was as simple as saying, "I want you to discover what I discovered." "Come and see."

What happens next is famous. People who don't even know the Bible know Nathanael's response. When the excited Philip tells his friend that he has found the Messiah promised in scripture, Jesus of Nazareth, "Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46) How would you respond to that? How would you feel if your friend came back with a smart aleck remark about something you were so excited about?

I think Philip's reaction is remarkable. If Nathanael was his best friend, he likely knew that Nathanael would scoff, or make fun of him, or ignore him all together, or even worse, make a racist slur. He probably knew that is the kind of person Nathan is. But he goes and tells him anyway. I think that's kind of cool. Like this news was too good not to share, especially with such a good friend.

And I think what's even cooler is Philip's reaction to Nathanael's dismissive remark. He doesn't retort something back, as I think I might. Or get defensive, as I know I would. Or walk away hurt or angry, vowing never to share anything with Nathanael again. No, he doesn't do any of these things. Instead, he just takes it in stride and answers, "Come and see." He offers the same invitation to see that Jesus offered the day before. "Come and see."

Take note here -- this is about an invitation to see. It's not about cramming your faith down someone else's throat. Nowhere in the Bible does it tell us to say, "Have you given your life to Christ?" Or, worse: "Do you know where you will spend eternity?" Or, maybe rock bottom: "God loves you and wants a relationship with you...but if you turn away God will send you to hell." Rather, the simple words of an invitation to see. Such simple, open, and inviting words that sum up not only the heart of the Gospel of John but the whole Christian life. "Come and see." ²

And the words work. Come and see works. The invitation to see offered by Philip to his negative, skeptic, nothing good can come for that type of friend, decides to go and see. When he meets Jesus, suddenly he is transformed from a nothing good to a something can person and Nathanael becomes the fourth disciple of Jesus.

Two disciples invite two others to come and see. John wants us to know that the way the Jesus movement began and grew was by extending an invitation to see to family and friends. These invitations were extended, over and over again over the next three years of Jesus life and then continued after his resurrection. On Pentecost, Peter extends the invitation and the church is launched and we are told, as they said, "Come and see," "day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved." (Acts 2: 47)

Rodney Starke is a professor at the University of Washington and has written a book titled *The Rise of Christianity* published by the Princeton University Press. It's respected scholarship. He estimates that by 40 AD, there were approximately 1,000 in the Roman Empire, a number that we might consider conservative since Acts says that 3,000 were converted on the day of

Pentecost. He's done his research using outside sources. If we allow that his number is close, that represents 17/1000th of 1% of the Roman Empire, hardly enough to notice. By the end of the 1st century, they were up to 7500 believers or about 7/10 of one percent.

The math teachers and stock brokers in our congregation will tell us that if you can grow your money or a movement of people by seven percent per year, in ten years you can double it. That's the law of compounding. Starke indicates that using their circle of influence and the invitation to come and see, Christianity moved to from 1,000 to 218,000 believers by the year 200 AD. Still, Christians represented only 36/100 of 1% of the population of the empire. This is remarkable in and of itself in beginning in 64 AD with the burning of Rome, Christians were persecuted more years than not through the end of the first century and through the second.

But Christianity didn't stop growing. Within their circles, they kept offering an invitation to see and with the help of their witness and the law of compounding, by the time Constantine became emperor 313 AD and a census taken in 350 AD, there were 33.9 million Christians in the Roman Empire, representing 56.5 percent of the population. How can that be? The reason is clear. What they saw in the way people followed Jesus, what it meant to be Christian, they were so moved by, so profoundly changed by, that they simply had to extend an invitation to "come and see."³

Perhaps the greatest example came in the late second century in the invitation made to Tertullian. The son of a Roman centurion and a lawyer, Tertullian was so impressed by the character of Christian living, that he wrote, "Look how they love one another and how they are ready to die for each other." Tertullian was invited to come and see and when he did, he converted, became a priest and is considered the first great Latin theologian of the church.

The cause of Jesus Christ grew, from the opening chapter of John when Andrew invited Peter and Philip invited Nathanael to this very day, by come and see. The future of the mission and ministry of the church depends upon the most basic human experience, the desire to invite others to see. But come and see always starts first with a belief that something is worth seeing.

What is worth seeing? That's not a pie in the sky theological question. Rather it is question about nothing or something, about what you see about being a Christ follower and what you might want others to see in your life and in this place. An invitation to come and see requires an assessment on your part on what you find meaningful, what sustains you, what keeps you

engaged. What's really important to you and what would you want others to see?

If your kitchen remodel is botched, you don't invite people to "come and see." If you go to a restaurant and the food is awful and the service bad, you don't invite people to see the new place. You have to have positive reasons, reasons of to extend to a family member, a friend, a neighbor and invitation to see. Come and see why this is important, why this is meaningful, why I follow Him here.

Maybe it is the engagement you feel in worship, the inspiration of the music that lifts you each week and helps you stay connected and committed. Perhaps is the way we care for others through our season for giving and food pantry support. Maybe it is the sense of community that you discovered which offers support, prayer and encouragement. It could be that it has nothing to do about this place but more to do about your relationship, about how God sustained you during a time of grief or the peace you have in following Jesus. Just making the assessment is important for you spiritually.

What's your story? What do you see that you might want to a friend to see? The invitation to see is the principle of the Great Commission, the challenge that Jesus made to his disciples as He ascended into heaven. That challenge is yours and it is a challenge that Jesus places on every follower.

I hope you'll accept that challenge. It's not my challenge. It's Jesus invitation to see. See where God is working in your life. Think about why it's important to you, about where you are connected, about what's meaningful about following Jesus. Then, invite someone to see. You might be surprised about how much joy you discover in sharing the love of God in Jesus by simply saying, "Come and See." Sharing something that matters to you with someone that matter is, as simple as that.

¹True Friends, Brian Wilkerson, Grace Chapel, @ preachingtoday.com

² **Come and See**, Sunday, January 08, 2012@ Dear Working Preacher, David Lose.

³ The Rise of Christianity, Rodney Stark. Princeton University Press. 1996. page 7.