The Gospel of John: *Come and See*
John 1:43-51

As we return to our journey through John’s Gospel, we return to Bethany where three disciples have intersected with Jesus: Andrew, his brother Simon, and likely John the son of Zebedee. Once again, our text for this morning happens on “the next day.” So, please stand and let us read John 1:43-51:

43 The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Follow me.” 44 Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. 45 Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.” 46 Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.” 47 Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!” 48 Nathanael said to him, “How do you know me?” Jesus answered him, “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.” 49 Nathanael answered him, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” 50 Jesus answered him, “Because I said to you, ‘I saw you under the fig tree,’ do you believe? You will see greater things than these.” 51 And he said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”

My message this morning will fall under three subheadings: 1) Being Found; 2) Finding Others; 3) An Authentic Encounter with Jesus.

**I. Being Found**

Once again John acknowledges that the events he is writing about took place on “the next day.” (Angie…can you create a slide that numbers the days with a brief summary using what I have written here?) If we’re keeping track of days, we are on the 4th day of this particular week that began with John the Baptist and the interrogation crew sent from Jerusalem. The second day was when John first identified Jesus as “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” The third day featured Andrew and another disciple of the Baptizer who leave their teacher to follow Jesus, and that day concluded with Jesus being introduced to Simon who Jesus renames, “Peter.” So, today…as we come to vs. 43, we are on the fourth day of the week; and, once again, the action begins in Bethany beyond the Jordan. However, right away we learn in vs. 43 “The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee” (show map [https://www.ccel.org/bible/phillips/CNM02-Jesus-Year1.gif](https://www.ccel.org/bible/phillips/CNM02-Jesus-Year1.gif)). Let’s pull up a very basic map here and we will see that Jesus has been south, not far from Jerusalem, but now He will begin a journey north to the region of Galilee where much of his ministry will take place.

Now, right away, we learn that Jesus has chosen a travelling companion. Returning to vs. 43 we read, [Jesus] found Philip and said to him, “Follow me.” Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter.

So, again, let’s look at the map and we’ll see that Philip was from Galilee, as was Andrew and Peter…these guys were all from Bethsaida. So Jesus, a Galilean, is fixing to head north with his Galilean disciples.

Now, we don’t know why Jesus sought out Philip. Clearly Philip was a Galilean, so it would make sense for Philip to join the party going north with Jesus and the other Galileans. But we get the sense here that Philip would not have followed Jesus unless invited by Jesus himself.
Unlike Andrew and the other disciple of the Baptist, Philip does not pursue Jesus, requesting to be accepted as a student. Instead, we find here that Jesus, the rabbi, pursues Philip and invites him to come along. Church, pursuing Jesus feels like work—being pursued by Jesus feels like Heaven!

I’m going to draw a parallel here for a minute that might sound like bragging, but I don’t intend to brag…so please forgive me if it comes across that way. When I was a student at Wake Forest University, I was very active in the theater and music departments. I was particularly fond of the big, mainstage shows that took place every spring under the direction of a visiting professor named Mr. James Dodding. Mr. Dodding was from London, but he would come and spend each spring semester as a visiting professor at Wake, and his shows were always the biggest and the best…he was a pretty famous director, actually. So, during the spring semester of my freshman year I auditioned for the Dodding show, *Man of La Mancha*, and though I was called back for a lead role, I ended up getting a small, supporting role. The next year I auditioned for the Dodding show called *The Beaux Stratagem*, and once again I was cast in a supporting, comedic part that I enjoyed very much. But when the spring semester started for my junior year, Mr. Dodding found me in the music department and asked me to come to his office. When I arrived, he handed me the script for the Gilbert and Sullivan musical called *Iolanthe*, and he said, “Jim, I chose this show with you in mind. I want you to play “the Lord Chancellor”…the lead role.”

I’m sure that kind of thing happens in Hollywood all the time, but for this small-town kid…that was the most amazing experience of my theatrical life! I didn’t have to audition to get the part…I didn’t need to pursue the part…the Director pursued me. He picked the show with ME in mind!

Now…keep that picture in your mind and think upon our text thus far this morning. On the fourth day, Jesus FINDS Philip…why? Because an adventure awaits…a road trip to Galilee, and this show requires just the right kind of actor…and his name is Philip! So, Jesus seeks Philip out…He FINDS Philip…and He says, “I chose this trip with you in mind!” Can you imagine what that was like for this otherwise demur, unimpressive young man? We never find that Philip is extraordinary in speech or bravery or even intelligence, but Jesus seeks him out specifically. Why? Only Jesus knows…but I think we can find a clue in what comes next. I’ll get to that in a moment, but Church…don’t miss the point here:

Jesus is the Good Shepherd who came to seek and to save the lost. Lost people don’t find Jesus…they are found BY Jesus. And Jesus doesn’t simply seek us out to save us from Hell; He seeks us out to play a role in God’s redemptive drama. We all play unique roles. Some of us have very obvious roles, others not as much. But as we say in the theater: “There is no such thing as a small part; only small actors.” In other words, Jesus assigns the part…Jesus finds us…Jesus knows EXACTLY what He has planned for our lives and how we are to serve His agenda in the days that we have been assigned. Our job is to “follow Him,” which means we will play our part with commitment, energy, imagination, and determination. And, if we are faithful to the roles He assigns to us, our roles will likely change over time, just as my roles in the theater changed over time.

I remember when I was graduating from Princeton Seminary and began looking for my first, full-time ministry position…I was pretty confident I would land a high-paying job in a large church.
At the age of 26 I had a religion degree from Wake Forest, an M.Div from Princeton, and I had been working in churches as a Youth Minister for 8 years! I was married to a beautiful wife who had a Master’s Degree in Sacred Music and was also experienced in church work. So, I sent out my resume to all kinds of large churches, and I circulated our information through my network of contacts in the Southern Baptist Convention where I was ordained at the time. After several weeks, we had only heard from two small churches in NC for jobs we didn’t even apply for, so during our spring break we went to interview with those churches. At the second church, there in Plymouth, NC, we sensed God calling us to a small, 200 member Baptist church in a tiny town of 4,000 people. I have to admit, I was very humbled. But Christy and I had learned from our musical and theatre experiences; there are no small parts, just small actors. So, Christy and I poured ourselves into that church and that community for seven years, and I remember saying on several occasions, “It will take a backhoe to move me out of this town!” That’s how much I loved my small part in my small church in that small town! But at the end of our 7th year, God made it clear that we were to move. He had another role in mind for me and for Christy. To be honest, I didn’t want a new role…but it was clear that Jesus had already cast my name. Once again, Christy and I poured ourselves into the church and the people on Hilton Head Island, and we did so for 5 years with great joy. Again…we were so happy and so content. We would have loved to remain in that beautiful location for the rest of our lives, but that role came to an end as well. In 2008, I received a call to come to Colonial as the church’s next Lead Pastor. Once again, that is not a role that I was seeking…I would have been very content to remain in a small church in a small town in a small role. But casting roles is not the job of the actor…it is the prerogative of the Director! Such is how Christy and I ended up here almost 12 years ago with three small boys…knowing NO ONE in Kansas City…leaving behind our families and our friends…because that was the role Jesus had written for us. He found us, and He called us to follow Him to KC, and we are forever grateful!

Friend…are you dissatisfied with your role? Do you wish to have a greater influence, to do more for Jesus, to play a greater role? Here’s what I can tell you for certain: you will not get a leading role until you have demonstrated your whole-hearted commitment to play your current role as though it was the only role you will ever get. That’s true in theater…it’s true in ministry…it’s true in life. In Matthew 25, in the Parable of the Talents, the Master says to the faithful servants who invested the five talents and two talents, “Well done good and faithful servants. You have been faithful with a little, I will set you over much.” But what do we see of that servant who was only given one talent? In his bitterness, pettiness, and foolishness, he chose to bury the one talent he was given instead of investing himself into what had been entrusted to him. We know how that story goes, right? The master returns and casts that worthless servant into the outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. There are no small roles; just small actors.

Philip’s role was small. He was not a Peter, James, or John…nor was he ever intended to be one of those guys. Philip was chosen by Jesus…found by Jesus…to play the role that Jesus created for him…and he poured himself into that role fully…he followed Jesus! Church, let Jesus determine your role…our job is to be fully invested in what He has called us to, no matter how great or small that may seem to us at the time. Remember, not a single one of us has written this show called life! We are actors on a stage we did not build in a story we did not write…we must trust the Playwright…we must play our role…which means we take who we are, and how we
are, and what we have been given, and we follow Jesus! Amen? Let us now turn to my next subheading…

II. Finding Others

Let’s pick up the story beginning with vs. 45:
Philip found Nathaniel and said to him, “We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.”

Philip models the inevitable response of a life FOUND by Jesus: he seeks out and invites others to meet Jesus. As Jesus found Philip, Philip now sets out to FIND Nathaniel as an agent of Jesus.

Church, I don’t know how many of you read the recent letter sent out by our Strategic Planning elder, but I want to draw your attention to something we learned from our survey of this church. We learned that over 30% of our congregation has NEVER invited a single person to come and meet Jesus at our church. Another 33% admitted that they have not invited a soul in the past 3 months or longer. I find those statistics to be perplexing and disturbing. I’m sure there are a myriad of excuses that 63% of our congregation would give for why they have not invited people to meet Jesus in His church. You don’t like the music. You don’t like the preacher. You don’t think people would come. You are afraid of offending people. Or perhaps you are afraid that your neighbors might actually come, and then you have to pour more energy into that relationship. I don’t know what the excuses are for 2/3 of our church to be “uninviting;” but to me, there is only ONE acceptable reason for you to not invite people to Colonial.

No one should EVER be invited to Colonial if JESUS is not to be found here. If JESUS is not preached, if Jesus is not proclaimed, if Jesus is not exalted, if the Spirit of Jesus is absent…if there is no evidence that the people herein are the BODY OF CHRIST and the BRIDE of CHRIST…then by all means, PLEASE DO NOT invite people to Colonial.

However, if you have been found by Jesus…and if you…if we, as those found by Jesus, know that Jesus is here and that our Master is eager to transform our hurting, lost, confused friends like he transformed us…then I do not think there is even one single, acceptable excuse for not inviting another person to come and meet Him here!

In fact, if you have no zeal for inviting lost people to meet Jesus…if you have no excitement for what you have found in Christ…if you can’t remember the last time you even thought about inviting a sin-sick soul to meet with the Great Physician…friends I can tell you for certain; you have yet to meet my Jesus! You might know about Him, but you haven’t met HIM! You might be a brilliant student about the end times, but you haven’t walked with Him! You may be theological astute, but you haven’t been healed by Him! You might find Him interesting, but you have not yet been UNDONE by His unmerited grace and His unconditional love for you!

Because listen: when those things happen…when you MEET Him and KNOW Him and WALK with Him…you will invite others to do the same. You just will…and Philip is a perfect example of that. Those souls saved and redeemed at the Healing House…they are perfect example of that. Those souls saved and redeemed in Hindu or Islamic countries become instant inviters at the risk of their very lives. Souls saved in prisons…they are ALL inviters. Go anywhere in the world,
find a soul who has been transformed by the mercy of Jesus, and they are ALL inviters! Saved people live to FIND OTHERS…and so should we. Now, I know that many of you are offended…PLEASE be offended! Please don’t leave here “unoffended!” Listen: if you have no zeal for the lost, if you have no courage to invite a friend to meet Jesus, don’t ignore those signs…they are indicators of a terrible sickness that threatens to kill your faith altogether. Go to the Doctor and ask Him for a fresh injection of the Holy Spirit! Go to the Cross and see yourself nailing the Lamb to a tree with the hammer of your sins, so that you might fall in love afresh and anew with the One who died to set you free! Church, do not be satisfied with a powerless, zeal-less, apathetic faith that rarely if ever prompts you to invite a lost one to come home! I find no semblance of that kind of faith in the New Testament, or anywhere else in the world where Christianity thrives under the horrors of persecution. Must we bleed for our faith before we will finally care enough to invite hell-bound souls to meet the Savior? That day may come sooner than we could imagine. Pray that it never comes, for I fear many of us would fall away in an instant. Why? Because if we don’t have the courage to invite people to meet Jesus when it costs us nothing, how will we stand when it costs us everything?

Church, I love you…with all of my heart, you know I do. But these statistics are unacceptable for the Body of Christ called Colonial. We must set aside thinking of ourselves, we must set aside our complaints and our petty preferences, and we must set before us the SAVIOR, the One who FOUND us, and we must follow HIM. Philip demonstrates what that looks like at the minimum: we will go and find others and invite them to meet Jesus! Amen?

Now, notice, Philip employs two strategies in his invitation to Nathaniel. First, Philip presents Jesus as the answer to the question that Nathaniel is already asking. Pay attention to what Philip says, “We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote…Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.” Why would Philip present Jesus in those terms? Because Nathaniel was an intellectual who studied the scriptures in anticipation of the Messiah. And here’s how we know: Nathaniel responds, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”

Nathaniel knows that there are no Messianic prophecies that point to Nazareth. The Messiah is to come from Bethlehem, and clearly very few people at this point would know about the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem due to the Roman census 30 years earlier. But notice, Philip got Nathaniel’s attention by speaking his language and presenting Jesus as the answer to Philip’s heart question. But when Nathaniel pushes back with his doubts and quibbles, Philip wisely does not engage Nathaniel in a debate. Instead, once Nathaniel shows any interest at all, Philip simply says in vs. 46, “Come and see.”

Church, very few people…but any…are ever argued into the faith. I wish that were not true, because I love to argue…I’m good at it! If people could be argued into the faith, I would have converted thousands by now! But alas, people are not argued into the faith…they come to faith when they meet Jesus. They kneel when they finally see the Lamb of God upon a cross they deserve. Don’t attempt to argue people to Jesus, bring them to “come and see.” Bring them into the presence of the Holy Spirit as the Bride of Christ gathers in community. Bring them to come and see that the Lord is good in the sacraments. Bring them into your home to come and see a household under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. We don’t need all the answers…we simply need
the courage to invite people to “come and see.” Once they come, when their hearts are open, they will have…

III. An authentic encounter with Jesus. Look now to vss. 47-51:

Jesus saw Nathaniel coming toward him, and said of him, “Behold, and Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!” Nathaniel said to him, “How do you know me?” Jesus answered him, “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.” Nathaniel answered him, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!”

What did you see? Let us make a few observations:

1) Jesus sees us coming. As soon as a human soul turns towards Jesus…as soon as we are open to a meeting with Jesus, we suddenly become aware of the fact that Jesus has already been looking at us…He has been looking upon our hearts…and He knows us better than we know us! Jesus knows that Nathaniel is a sincere, devout Jew who longs for the coming of the Messiah. He says of Nathaniel, “…of whom there is no deceit.” Let us now consult the Greek with the Greek! The Greek word for “deceit” here is dolos, which literally means deceit, cunning, or treachery. In other words, Jesus recognizes that Nathaniel is not interested in convincing people that he is “a good, religious person.” Nathaniel has no alternative motives; he is not studying the scripture in hopes of making money on what he learns. Nathaniel is a sincere seeker of the truth…he is pure-hearted in his intent.

2) The seeker knows that he is known! Nathaniel responds with disbelief and even a bit of suspicion in vs. 48, “How do you know me?” Nathaniel is not arguing what Jesus has said about him…it is obviously spot on. The intellectual is looking for a reasonable explanation for how Jesus knows him…given they have never met until now. Perhaps Philip gave Jesus the skinny on Nathaniel earlier. Maybe Jesus knows Nathaniel’s parents. There must be some reasonable explanation for how Jesus just proclaimed over Nathaniel what he knows himself to be: a sincere student of the scriptures with no guile or deceit.

Church, pay attention: This is the way that Jesus often wins a soul to Himself, even in the middle of a church service. If you study the testimonies of those who have had an authentic encounter with Jesus, you will often hear this phrase: “I felt like every word was spoken directly to me. I felt like every word of that song, every word of that sermon, every word of the Scripture…was written just for me…spoken just to me.” The is the testimony of a seeker when she discovers that she is KNOWN! When the seeker becomes aware that Jesus KNOWS him, when every word begins to strike deep like a knife into the heart…the human spirit begs the question, “How does He know me?” And listen to what Jesus says…

3) I saw you in the secret place. Look at vs. 48, as Jesus replies to Nathaniel’s question, “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.” All the commentators agree that the “fig tree” is not a random place or instance where Nathaniel was recently taking a nap. William Barclay writes:

To the Jews, the fig-tree always stood for peace. Their idea of peace was when a man could be undisturbed under his own vine, under his own fig-tree (1 Kings 4:25; Micah 4:4). Further, the fig tree was leafy and shady, and it was the custom to sit and meditate under the roof of its branches. No doubt that is what Nathaniel had been doing; and no doubt as he sat under the fig-tree he prayed for the day when God’s Chosen One should come. No doubt he had been meditating on the promises of God. And now he felt that Jesus had seen into the very depths of his heart.
Church…listen to what Barclay writes next, because I feel like this captures this moment between Jesus and Nathaniel so beautifully:

It was not so much that Jesus had seen him under the fig-tree that surprised Nathaniel; it was the fact that Jesus had read the thoughts of his inmost heart. Nathaniel said to himself: “Here is the man who understands my dreams! Here is the man who knows my prayers! Here is the man who has seen into my most intimate and secret longing, a longing which I have never even dared put into words! Here is the man who can translate the inarticulate sigh of my soul! This must be God’s anointed One and no other.”

Oh, that we would have an authentic encounter with the LIVING GOD and discover that there is ONE who can translate the inarticulate sigh of our souls!!! Church, Jesus knows you! He knows every part of you that hurts; He knows your deepest longings; He knows why you are so angry, He understands why you are so afraid; He knows what happened to you when you were a child; He saw you when that injustice took place; He knows why you have become the way you are.

He KNOWS…but listen: He loves you! He knows you…AND He loves you! He knows everything about you…AND He desires you! He knows it all…and He has written you into to His show and given you an important role that only you can play! He knows…and that is because, as Nathaniel proclaims, “You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!!”

He knows you seeker…He has heard you say that you don’t believe in God…He has heard you say you are an atheist or an agnostic…He has seen you present yourself as a great many things. But listen: He knows…He has heard your secret prayer…He hears you in that place that no one else does. Your Father and Savior has never once turned from you, though you have so often turned from Him. But now you private seekers, take heart: He has come to you! He has FOUND you! He has invited you to follow Him, and He has promised that GREATER THINGS are yet to come! That’s what Jesus told Nathaniel! Listen to what He said, “Because I said to you, “I saw you under the fig tree,” do you believe? You will see greater things than these. Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”

Do you want to be where the action is? Do you want to see God at work, redeeming the world one person at a time? Do you want to see where there is hope in this dark hour? Follow HIM! Go where He is leading you! Leave behind your predictable life of self-indulgence; set aside your obsession with “more information;” step away from the safety of your little world and join Jesus for the journey north, into the wild country of obedience and faith! It is there that you will see the heavens open…it is there that all the best stories are told…it is there that you will finally discover the role that was written just for you! Church…do you believe? Then I tell you, even greater things are yet come! You ain’t seen nothing yet! Our greatest days are still in front of us, but if those days are to come to pass…we must follow Him, and we must invite others to follow Him. We must be found, and we must set out to find.

It begins with an authentic encounter with Jesus. I invite you this morning, each and every one of you, “Come and See.” Come and see. Come to Jesus…and you will see. It begins with a simple prayer…but it must be the most honest words you have ever spoken. Simply whisper to the God who is there “I want to see Jesus.” When I spoke those words in the fall of 1995…when I had come to the end of myself and nothing else mattered…I had an authentic encounter with
Jesus that changed my life forever. Today is the day…Jesus is passing by. He is heading north, and He is seeking those who will travel with Him. If your heart is stirred within you this morning, make no mistake: He is calling you to Follow Him. Church…follow Him.

Let’s pray.