



# Saint Peter's Episcopal Cathedral

January 14, 2024  
2nd Sunday after the Epiphany

Sermon – Come, See, and Follow

John 1:43-51

TVR. Scott Anderson

St. Peter's Cathedral

January 14, 2023

John 1:43-51

*Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth." Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, "Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!" Nathanael asked him, "Where did you get to know me?" Jesus answered, "I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you." Nathanael replied, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" Jesus answered, "Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these." And he said to him, "Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."*

I don't know if you have come across the author Richard Foster in your reading. I hope you have. He has written many books, but the book that launched him, I think, most was one he wrote twenty-five years ago called *Celebration of Discipline*. In it he explores the various disciplines of a Christian life, and divides those disciplines into three primary areas: Inward, Outward, and Corporate. If you haven't, it is really worth the read.

You can probably guess what those three areas address, self-disciplines that govern individuals' internal lives, corporate disciplines that guide us in worship, and then the one that came to my mind to me this past week, outward discipline, that direct how we should effectively interact with the world around us so that we might be led by our faith rather than our misperceptions. It came to mind because in it Foster recommends a path of simplicity in our outward spiritual journey, and I like simplicity. Her thing is that simplicity does not necessarily mean simple. So, here is a partial list and you can be the judge...

Number one, buy things for their usefulness rather than their status.

Second, reject anything that is producing an addiction in you. Anything.

Third, develop a habit of giving things away.

Fourth, refuse to be propagandized by the custodians of modern gadgetry.

Fifth, learn to enjoy things without owning them.

Sixth, develop a deeper appreciation for the creation.

Seventh, look at a healthy skepticism at all "buy now, pay later" schemes.

Eighth, obey Jesus' instructions about plain, honest speech.

Finally, shun whatever would distract you from the main goal to "Seek First the Kingdom of God."

You know, I would agree that Foster's list for outward discipline does reflect a level of simplicity. I have no doubt that he would be a big fan of the K.I.S.S. rule: Keep it Simple Sherlock. Even so, I don't think that most people find Foster's advice at all simple within our world and culture, where status rules, addicts get redefined as enthusiasts, personal desire and personal consumption related to those desires are encouraged, and Seek First the Kingdom of God is lived out as Seek first the kingdom of me.

In our Gospel passage this morning, I think that it is safe to say that Phillip would also be a K.I.S.S. aficionado. He goes to his friend, Nathanael, to tell him that they found the Messiah, the one who Moses and the prophets talked about. When Nathanael scoffs a bit about nothing good coming from Nazareth, Philip doesn't launch into a review of Jewish Scripture, reviewing the teachings of Moses and pulling out his commentaries on Isaiah and quoting

learned Rabbis. He simply replies by saying, I would imagine with a bit of a smile on his face, “Good one about Nazareth, Nate. But seriously, why don’t you just come and see?” There is a simple solution to your hesitancy. Just come, and see?

You know, those words, “come and see”, might be some of the most effective and powerful... and dangerous... evangelistic words in all of Scripture. They are effective because they invite instead of condemn. They include instead of divide. They are powerful because when people do come into the presence of Christ, when they see what that relationship brings, they find what most people are truly looking for in all the other stuff. They find joy and peace and transformation into a new life of deeper purpose and greater meaning.

But they are also challenging, maybe even dangerous. They are challenging, and dangerous for us, because we, the church, followers of Christ, are typically the first face of Christ for the world through which they are supposed to see Jesus. We are the first expression of Jesus that most people will get to see and come to know.

It is important to understand that because we are inviting them into an experience of something that is not often prominent around them. We are inviting them to something outside of most of the present human experience. We are inviting them deeper to Jesus’ love, and his truth upon which that love is constructed from. We are inviting them out of themselves, into their true selves.

We are challenging them with something bigger. And “we” is the first step of that process. We are asking them to know Jesus at a deeper level and that starts with us. We are inviting them to love... Jesus style, by seeing us do it. We are inviting them to love more fully, at a deeper level, based on eternal truth, by embracing that for our lives. To love all people, not just those who you would be comfortable having over for dinner. People like the prostitute about to be stoned, the tax collector who climbed up into the tree to get a better view, the Samaritan woman at the well, maybe even a denying apostle outside the trial and the one nailing him up on the cross. Imagine that kind of love! And imagine what that might require.

Imagine a love strong enough and pure enough to invite them all into knowing Jesus’ truth through teachings that showed us the way. That tell us, when we have a stone in our hand raised against another, “He who is without sin, let him be the one to throw first.” We invite them to understand the fullness of life as God intended, while also understanding that forgiveness within our confusion is God’s intention, not a condemnation. Imagine a love strong enough to invite them into a relationship that will bring true life instead of caring so little that we are willing to leave them to struggle within it lifeless substitute.

That’s how it works. When we invite others to come and see Jesus, we are representing him by showing them who we are, who you are, with Jesus. Loving others, beyond our own ability. Teaching others, beyond our comfort level.

We get to participate in the ongoing story of salvation, going out two by two, or four by four, or congregation by congregation, touching base with Christ along our journey. And in the process, we get to come and see what can be done in our own lives when it is done in Christ’s name. We get to come and see Jesus, more and more, day by day. We get to be transformed as we share transformation with those we encounter.

And, finally, within this “come and see” life of invitation, we will get to experience what the world can look like because of Jesus. Those who could not see, receive clear vision. Those who could not hear, don’t miss a sound. Those who were hobbled by the world walk with ease. Those who were dead... actually find life again.

Everyday, we are invited, people are invited, to come and see. And within that mission of invitation to know and follow Christ is where the challenge for the church lies. And that is also where the danger for the church exists. You see, many have come, and looked, but often the way of Christ was hard to see. They are coming, even today, in numbers that are hard to count. They are looking for Christ. They are looking for God. They are seeking something more than what our fallen, divisive world is offering. They are looking for the promise of a new way with people who faithfully embrace that way.

As we move enthusiastically into a new year, we must always remember that we are the bringers of Christ for the world and the world is coming, hoping to see. They are looking for a glimmer of light in a dark world. They are looking for foundational truth in an environment of confusion and lies. They are looking for a place to be, and a

people to journey with, who point to the light, and the abundant love, and that live-bringing truth of the Savior who was sent by God.

When we say to people, “come and see,” we need to have prepared ourselves, individually and as the church, to be a sincere reflection within this world of the thing that we are inviting them to. That is our K.I.S.S. rule for our journey. That is the simplicity of the way it works.

Come and see Jesus by seeing a people who know and follow him. Come and see the difference it can make when he is embraced fully. Come and see and imagine what the world could be, what the world should be, what the world was made to be.

Our ongoing job, as the church, is to help people to come, see, and follow. While it may not always be easy, it really is that simple.

Amen.