

John 1:43-51

**Come and See©
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Rev. Sharlyn Gates

What was it like – the first time you really saw Jesus? I mean, when you saw him in a new and deeply meaningful way? When did you first have an Epiphany? That Aha! Moment when you saw more clearly what Jesus did – for you; who Jesus really is?

When I see video clips from movies like that one, depicting Jesus through the gospel of John, it makes me wish so much that I could literally “come and see.”

To look him in the face, to see deeply in his eyes the love he has for me. To walk beside him, or to sit for a while in conversation with Jesus – would be the most wonderful thing I can imagine.

But if you had that opportunity to sit and talk to Jesus, what would you ask him? What would you want to know about that might cause him to say to you, as he did Nathaniel – “Come and see. Come along with me, follow me, and see for yourself.”

What would it be like if you were alone with this man – this person who is God, yet who came to join us in our humanity – to relate to us on every level?

Would you talk to him like you do when you pray? How do you talk to Jesus when you pray? Here’s how my prayer goes often times:

Dear God (or Jesus),
Thank you for this day (and I talk about the good things in the day)

Thank you for my family, and my congregation (and I talk about the good things and the struggles and the hope for help and protection for them)

And I say – tonight I pray for ... and I name people who are sick, or in trouble, or who are hurting, or afraid.

You know, kind of like the prayers here.

First of all, this isn’t about how prayer should be. Your prayers should be however you choose to talk to God. They are fine however you do it. Just do it.

But, if you were sitting with Jesus right in front of you, having an intimate conversation – would you talk to him the same way you pray?

I thought about this for a while as I was writing. What would I ask him about? What would I like to “see” more clearly?

This is still the Season of Epiphany – a good time to strive for seeing things about God in a new way. We have celebrated the birth of Jesus and we heard about the wise men from the East who saw the star and followed; who saw the baby boy and knew he was the one they had been seeking – the King of the Jews.

We heard about Jesus' baptism, last Sunday, and how the Spirit of God came down like a dove and how God's own voice spoke out saying "This is my Son, of whom I am well pleased."

We even heard how our own baptism is something much bigger than what we can see on the outside; it is something God does on the inside. It is grace; it is belonging; it is love poured over us who are God's sons and daughters.

John tells some of the men found Jesus and wanted to know more about him. And Jesus invited them to follow.

"Come and see."

And sometimes Jesus sought the person out, asking them to come with him; again to follow him and to see what he was all about.

Those men we heard about today – some of the first disciples – Peter, Andrew, Phillip, Nathaniel – heard that call to "see" and to "follow" Jesus, and they went.

Can't you imagine how they came to know him? The things they learned about him – his heart full of compassion and mercy; his care for the sick and the poor; his way of talking and teaching about God, about the Scriptures; about life and love – must have been so amazing for them.

But, they weren't the only ones who were seeing. To follow Jesus day after day – to walk beside him, to eat with him, to live with him meant *they* had to show Jesus who *they* were as well. They had to trust that Jesus would accept them with all their quirks, all their weaknesses, all their failures. There was, most likely, nothing they could hide from Jesus.

So, what would you say if you were alone, face to face with Jesus?

"Dear Jesus, thank you for this day and for my family and please take care of them and help them and help me too to get that job or to not get sick or to do my best?"

I think we might, some of us, try that kind of conversation with him. It's the one we're comfortable with, after all. Anyway, I have it down pretty good.

And maybe if we keep it there, sort of formal and on the surface, we can kind of hide beneath it, and maybe we won't have to get real and show him who we really are – what we carry deep in our hearts – the pride, the grudges, the judgments on others, the self hatred for some, and the arrogance for others, the doubts and the fears that we all have.

And maybe some of us don't think that would be a problem, baring our souls like that, but I'll bet there might be a few of us who would just as soon not have to reveal everything we think, or feel, or have done to the God of the universe, sitting right before us as a human, with those eyes that can see deep into our soul anyway.

You know, the times when I've been my most real self with God are the times when I feel kind of hopeless and worthless and realize how far I've gone from what I think God's

vision is for me; those times when I end up on my knees for hours, pouring out my heart and soul.

It is then that I come to see who Jesus is for me – so forgiving, so loving, healing my heart, my soul; giving me new life and encouragement and strength.

It is then that the name “Redeemer” takes on significant meaning. It is then I “see” with new eyes how He redeems me; how he is a Savior because he has pulled me up time and again from that murky, slippery pit.

I think it is impossible to answer that call to follow him – to walk with him daily – and not “see” him with new eyes. But it also means that he sees us; we let him know us; we are willing to share our innermost thoughts and deepest longings with Jesus.

I’m positive that many of us have had those precious conversations with the Lord of Life, those intimate moments of pure grace.

If you have not yet given yourself over to the one who already knows you, knows everything about you – and loves you still – I hope you will allow that time to happen. I hope you will open your heart and your eyes to truly see who Jesus is and how amazing your relationship with him can be.

But, it doesn’t end there. Our faith – our own epiphanies – is not the end goal, as great as that is. Remember, while Jesus sought out some of his disciples, inviting them to follow him, others went and sought their friends and relatives and invited *them* to come and see Jesus.

Once we know him, we can tell others, we can invite others to come and get to know him too.

Where do you meet Jesus? Hopefully, the answer is “everywhere.” We see him in the community when someone is kind to a person who needs help; or patient with a person who is moving slow, or having a hard time understanding.

We see him in the faces of the poor – those who have little – little food, nothing much to keep them warm or safe, not much hope for anything better.

So, if we can see Jesus in so many places, why do we come here? Do you see him more clearly when the Word is read; when the bread is broken and the cup held up? When the water is poured and the hymns are sung? Do you see him more clearly in the faces of your brothers and sisters – the Body of Christ? Do you experience his encouragement and comfort when you are with the family of God? By coming here, are you challenged and strengthened and sent out for mission and ministry in the world? I hope so because I think that is the purpose of the Church.

If all that is true for you, then I want to encourage you this week to tell one person something about your joy, your love for Jesus, and invite them to come to the place where you love to come – where you meet him and can see him more clearly – where

you learn how to see him in all those other places, and then – invite them – to come with you – to come and see.

This song we are about to sing ("*Open the Eyes of My Heart*") is a prayer song – an intimate prayer asking Jesus to open the eyes of our hearts, to help us to “see him in new and clear ways; to see him as Lord and Savior, high and lifted up.

Shall we stand together and sing this prayer with our hearts full of love for him?

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The following is a quote Rev. Gates used at the end of the service, as she thought it related well to the sermon. The congregation seemed to like it a lot.

“Lying to God
is like sawing the branch
you're sitting on.
The better you do it,
the harder you fall.”

from Beyond Words
Frederick Buechner