**Showing People Jesus**

**By Jeff McDowell**

**1-14-24**

**Horseheads First UMC**

Sermon theme: Nathanael’s friend Philip was looking for the promised Savior along with others in the faith of the Israelites. But it took Philip to share his personal story of meeting Jesus to get him to come and see that the Savior had actually come to earth. How many times have you wanted to share the faith but shied away from introducing other people to Jesus? It’s as simple as that: Jesus is just around the corner waiting for you to tell others: “come and see!” Put your faith to the test and be ready to share the hope that lies within you. He is Savior and Lord and the sooner you believe it the sooner you will want to share that Jesus is good news.

Psalm 139: 1-6, 13-18

***1****O Lord, you have searched me and known me.****2****You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
    you discern my thoughts from far away.****3****You search out my path and my lying down,
    and are acquainted with all my ways.****4****Even before a word is on my tongue,
    O Lord, you know it completely.****5****You hem me in, behind and before,
    and lay your hand upon me.****6****Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
    it is so high that I cannot attain it.*

***13****For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother’s womb.****14****I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works;
that I know very well.****15****My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret,
    intricately woven in the depths of the earth.****16****Your eyes beheld my unformed substance.
In your book were written all the days that were formed for me,
    when none of them as yet existed.****17****How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God!
    How vast is the sum of them!****18****I try to count them—they are more than the sand;
    I come to the end[*[*a*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=psalm+139%3A1-6%2C+13-18&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-16258a)*]—I am still with you.*

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 about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth.’****46****Nathanael said to him, ‘Can anything good come out of Nazareth?’ Philip said to him, ‘Come and see.’****47****When Jesus saw Nathanael coming towards him, he said of him, ‘Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!’****48****Nathanael asked him, ‘Where did you come to know me?’ Jesus answered, ‘I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.’****49****Nathanael replied, ‘Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!’****50****Jesus answered, ‘Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these.’****51****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.’*

**Sermon Start:**

How do you feel when you hold your Bible in your hand? Confident, because you know it well and have read from it many times? You can find various books of the Bible and even quote many of them, chapter and verse? OR do you feel unsure of your Bible knowledge and wonder at those who can quote it and can find books quickly?

**Evangelism.** That is the topic today: something we tend to run away from in the 21st century American church. It is like a dirty word to us because either we believe the only evangelists are TV evangelists, or because we are uncomfortable with the concept of trying to persuade someone that our faith is real and they can have it too.

Today I want to share with you a different way of evangelism, a true way that is authentic and comfortable and simple: “Come and See.” We do need to “study to show ourselves approved, a workman that needs not be ashamed,” as St. Paul writes to the early church. However, our sharing of good news does not need to wait until we are Bible Scholars. In fact it cannot wait!

The story of Philip and Nathaneal is a story of simple evangelism: sharing an experience with another person, with Jesus at the center of it.

The word Evangel literally means Good News. Who wouldn’t want good news in today’s world of bad news? Bad news is all around us and it weighs us down. But Good News is another definition of Gospel, Christian Gospel. And an evangelist is literally a carrier of Good News; someone who carries good news. Now, that doesn’t sound so terrible, does it?

In ancient times, the way news traveled was by personal messenger. A man would be given a message written on a scroll, or memorized, and would bring that from one place to another; from one person to another. Now, who could afford to hire a messenger, knowing that it might take days or even weeks for them to go, deliver the message and return? Kings or other royalty. And you had to be able to trust the messenger to give the exact message you sent, not add to it or take away from it.

That role is the role of an evangelist: a messenger carrying good news from one kingdom to another.

If a messenger was carrying *bad news*, say that the king was *losing a battle*, the messenger knew the message was bad and that the message would not be well received. So that messenger would feel conflicted, unsure of how they would be received in the kingdom and worried. When you are worried and unsure, how do you walk? Every kingdom had lookouts who watched for enemies to protect the kingdom. They also watched for messages from afar. When a messenger was spotted, the lookout could tell if the messenger was carrying *good news or bad news* by the way they walked.

If you are carrying good news, you don’t hesitate to bring it, knowing the king will be happy with the news you bring. They probably will house you that night in a royal bedroom and feed you good royal food before you have to return. But if you are carrying bad news, you worry that the king will have you thrown out, because he is angry at the news. That phrase, “Don’t shoot the messenger” comes from times like this when a king would take out their frustration and anger at bad news on the one who brought it to them. Some messengers would actually be harmed in the anger of the king.

Why am I telling you all this?

Because you are carrying a message to others by how you walk. It is either good news or bad news, but be assured you are traveling and you are carrying a message.

Listen to this modern author on what it is to carry the gospel: --Frederick Buechner, Wishful Thinking, A Seeker's ABC (HarperOne, 1993).

*“Some think of a Christian as one who necessarily believes certain things. That Jesus was the son of God, say. Or that Mary was a virgin. Or that the Pope is infallible. Or that all other religions are all wrong.
Some think of a Christian as one who necessarily does certain things. Such as going to church. Getting baptized. Giving up liquor and tobacco. Reading the Bible. Doing a good deed a day.
Some think of a Christian as just a Nice Guy.*

*Jesus said "****I am the way, and the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me"*** *(John 14:6). He didn't say that any particular ethic, doctrine or religion was the way, the truth and the life. He said that he was. ...

A Christian is one who is on the way, though not necessarily very far along it, and who has at least some dim and half-baked idea of whom to thank.
A Christian isn't necessarily any nicer than anybody else. Just better informed.”*

Do you know Jesus? Then you are carrying good news around with you. Will you share it with others?

The story in John opens with Jesus on the road from the place of his baptism (likely on the Jordan River near the Dead Sea) back to Galilee, his home territory. The road running along the Jordan was the main north-south route through the region, and Jesus and his people would have traveled it many times on the way to and from Jerusalem for the various Jewish festivals and feasts. Having been baptized by John and commissioned for his mission, Jesus traveled north with Andrew and Simon Peter, his first two disciples, in tow (vv. 35-42).

Even though Galilee is the destination, we know that Jesus has a much longer journey in mind. In Bethsaida, the hometown of Andrew and Peter, Jesus encounters two men to whom he will also teach the rules of the road -- three rules to which everyone since has been compelled to adhere if they're going to become licensed disciples of Jesus. In fact, we could argue that these are the most important rules ever put on the books:

**Rule of the Road #1: FOLLOW.**"Follow me" (v. 43). Note that it's a command. It's not simply "believe in me," "think about me" or "consider me." It's "***follow me."*** To be a disciple of Jesus is to leave the route you were on and take a narrow road behind him. Know it all about God? No. Just follow God and God’s son Jesus.

Philip is the first to hear this clearly-stated rule in John's gospel. Unlike in other stories where the disciples drop their nets, or get up from the table and start falling in behind Jesus, ***Philip's first response to this rule is to go and get another follower.*** So compelling is this rule, that Philip recognizes it's one that everyone needs to observe in order to make it safely to an eternal destination.

The first person Philip tells is Nathanael (not an apostle, not of the 12). John's point might be that Jesus' command to "follow me" isn't just for those original 12 disciples but for everyone. Philip immediately sees that Jesus is the one about "whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth" (v. 45). Jesus, in other words, is the one to whom all the ancient Bible rules point.

Nathanael, however, sees the idea of a Messiah coming from Nazareth to be about as likely as a football game in Buffalo today. "Can anything good come out of (Buffalo) Nazareth?" he scoffs (v. 46).

Following Jesus means picking one direction -- better, one person -- to follow. It's the equivalent of veering off the superhighway and driving down a ***dirt road***, which is why it's a major deviation from the rules everyone else is following (Matthew 7:13). Later in John's gospel Jesus will say, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (14:6). It's that Jesus is calling people to follow him on the one road that leads straight to the heart of God and God's mission. Too often we've defined the rules of Christian faith in terms of what we believe about Jesus instead of focusing on actually following him and doing as he does. Information is important, but **imitating Jesus is really the heart of discipleship.** The only way we can really know what he is about is by ***going all in***, ***hustling*** to keep up and f***ollowing*** him, which leads us to the second rule:

**Rule of the Road #2: COME.** "Come and see" (v. 46). Philip responds to Nathanael's skepticism with an invitation to "come and see" what Jesus is about. Philip doesn't try to argue or coerce. Rather, he invites him to come and meet the rabbi. ***Where Nathanael puts a stop sign, Philip sees a green light.*** Philip knew that his skeptical friend would respond best to an invitation (the same invitation that Jesus had given to Andrew and Peter in v. 39). Philip will become a great evangelist because he sees everyone as simply needing an invitation and will spend most of his life on the road inviting others to "come and see" (Acts 8:4-40).

One of the key rules of the road for being a disciple is having a desire and a way for inviting people to come and meet Jesus. Who can you invite to "come and see?" (list all the events and opportunities just at our church, to invite people to. Of course, each one should have Jesus in them.

**Rule of the Road #3: SEE.** "You will see greater things than these" (v. 50). Nathanael was amazed that Jesus knew him, but Jesus told his new disciple that he hadn't seen anything yet. The rest of John's gospel reveals the amazing things. Those who accepted his invitation witnessed healings, exorcisms, miracles, the transfiguration and, especially, resurrections of the dead. Following Jesus was a ticket to a wild ride with many twists and turns.

How many invitations have you had to come follow Jesus? How many people over the course of your life have invited you into faith? Mentors, leaders, teachers, preachers, coworkers, parents, grandparents, and other relatives.

Evangelist Examples: people who directed others to Jesus.

1. Sarah, Christian, adult who grew up in the church, student, feminist, activist and single mother. Sarah knew many, many people from her partying days and places, her classroom and college and from the seedier side of town. Sarah had partied hard in her youth, had strayed from God many times, and admitted it openly. To witness to others Sarah often just brought them to church. “Meet pastor Jeff, you have to meet him. And come with me while I get some more of Jesus.” “Let’s go get some Jesus.” Sarah reached the drinkers, the skeptics, the questioners, the injured, the free-spirited ones, those rejected by society and she sat right there in church up front with them with no shame. “Come and see” was her method of being an evangelist. And she carried Good News, not that she was perfect or arrived, but that she knew Jesus, who was perfect and forgiving and accepting!
2. Mr. Procopio, music teacher who challenged all us students in high school to think for ourselves and come to faith in God. He taught us music at the right times and challenged us in our faith / non-faith in the off times.
3. Holy Spirit’s inspiration throughout childhood and youth and adulthood to come to God for answers, direction, guidance. Holy Spirit moments changed me and challenged me and still do.