

**Sermon**  
**St. Mary Nanoose Bay**  
**January 14, 2018**  
**John 1:43-51**

“Come and see.”

Each of us is invited somehow into relationship with Jesus in a way unique to us.

“Follow me.”

Millions of people through the millennia have come to know Jesus through some form of personal contact – through a friend or family member, through a seemingly random experience with a stranger, (or strangers), or through a direct encounter with Jesus himself. As we continue to celebrate the Epiphany, we have a wonderful opportunity to reflect on the moment or moments we encountered Jesus and how our lives have changed as a result.

Today in the brief gospel story of Nathanael, we see the sudden conversion of someone who seems pretty cynical. When invited by his friend Philip to come and see Jesus, he says, “Can anything come good come out of Nazareth?” prepared to dismiss Philip’s new friend on this basis alone. Seeing Nathanael approaching Jesus says, “Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit,” but Nathanael isn’t going to be pulled in by what he thinks is flattery. He retorts, “Where did you get to know me?” I imagine it wasn’t only Jesus’ reply “I saw you under the fig tree,” but something in his eyes, the way he held himself, and the authority with which he spoke that opened Nathanael’s eyes. And Nathanael blurted out what he suddenly knew in his heart – “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of

Israel!” And in that moment, his heart and life are changed... from the little we know, he becomes a faithful follower of Jesus.

Talk about skilful writing! In only 8 short lines, we have the story of an epiphany – the moment when someone recognizes truth and their life is changed forever.

But not everyone comes to God in this way. For some, there are repeated invitations. Others trick *themselves* into believing.

This past week, I was drawn to watch a film on Netflix I knew nothing about. Called “*The Case for Christ*,” it’s based on a book by the same title that tells the true story of Lee Strobel, an award-winning journalist and the Legal Editor of the Chicago Tribune. We learn that Lee and his wife, Lesley are atheists. And when their first child is a pre-schooler, she chokes in a restaurant and is given the Heimlich manoeuvre by a stranger. This stranger is a Christian. Lesley goes to thank the woman and at her invitation, attends church with her, and over time, she opens her heart to God. She is baptized. Lee doesn’t understand what’s happened. He feels he is losing his wife to “another man.” Their marriage falters.

He’s not going to give up easily. He decides to fight back and win her back with a logical, clear-cut rational case against her temporary “craziness.” He’s going to destroy her belief that Christ died on the cross and rose from the dead and came back to those who knew and loved him. Unbeknownst to her, Lee sets out to do a huge piece of journalistic investigation. For 2 years, he interviews key people across many disciplines including historians, archaeologists, biblical scholars (both Christian and atheist), psychologists and finally, the one that clinches it for him, a medical specialist who

confirms for Lee precisely what he does not want to hear, that Jesus definitely did die on the cross; there is no way he could have survived. I was interested to learn that the accounts we have of water and blood pouring out when the soldier pierced Jesus' side align with the medical diagnosis of what happens during crucifixion.

Surveying 2 years' worth of research, convinced by the conclusions he is forced to make - something inside Lee snaps. He admits defeat and opens himself to the God he can no longer ignore. He becomes a Christian, his marriage is saved, and the rest is history.

I tell you this story because it struck me that there are so many ways that Jesus reaches out to us. Pursuing and confirming facts is not one I had ever seriously considered. It affirms to me that God speaks to each of us in a way we can hear. There is no language God doesn't speak.

So epiphanies are epiphanies. Small or huge. Brought about by irrefutable evidence or through a small voice in our head or through hearing a scripture passage or through a film, or book, or the kindness of a stranger. Whatever opens our eyes to a new reality, whatever softens our hardened hearts, it's all good. Whatever it takes to bring us into relationship; the relationship that continues to bring us more fully into life is a wonderful thing.

"Come and see," Philip says to Nathanael. He invited his friend. Jesus did the rest.

Maybe that's all we have to do. Invite people to "come and see" - whether to church, to a movie we love, to a book we cherish, or to a meeting or meal or discussion group - our part is to do the inviting.

Of course, after experiences of being pushed, shamed or judged, many people are resistant to the invitation. So we need to relax, not push, and just be open to how God may be calling us to invite, share, include.

Last year during Holy Week, we shared an Agape Meal over in the hall. Bishop Logan invited us into a short dramatic reading around the table. In it, some parishioners took on the characters of the various disciples sharing the last meal with Jesus. Jesus asks them, "Where and when was it that you recognized me?" and each of them describes the moment, the interaction, observation that brought them to realize who he really was. In other words, their epiphany. Some pass when asked, they need more time to remember what it was that opened their eyes to who Jesus is.

We have to remember and treasure those moments when we've experienced God in our lives, the first time, and all the others. Then we can share more easily when we're having dinner with a friend, or when a stranger asks, "What is it that makes you believe?" We need to tell the stories to inspire others. We need to hear the stories to be inspired ourselves.

And if we can't remember what it was that brought us to God, or we haven't had an experience yet that has really opened our eyes, we can always ask, "Lord, open my eyes to your presence in my life," and then we need to keep our eyes open because Jesus often shows up in unexpected ways. And in predictable ones, like at the meal he is about to share with us.

Amen.