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John 1:35-49

³⁵ The next day John was there again with two of his disciples.³⁶ When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, “Look, the Lamb of God!” ³⁷ When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. ³⁸ Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, “What do you want?” They said, “Rabbi” (which means “Teacher”), “where are you staying?” ³⁹ “Come,” he replied, “and you will see.”

So they went and saw where he was staying, and they spent that day with him. It was about four in the afternoon. ⁴⁰ Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. ⁴¹ The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, “We have found the Messiah” (that is, the Christ). ⁴² And he brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, “You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas” (which, when translated, is Peter).

⁴³ The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, “Follow me.”

⁴⁴ Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. ⁴⁵ Philip found Nathanael and told him, “We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.”

⁴⁶ “Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?” Nathanael asked. “Come and see,” said Philip.

⁴⁷ When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, “Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.” ⁴⁸ “How do you know me?” Nathanael asked. Jesus answered, “I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you.”

⁴⁹ Then Nathanael declared, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel.”

Four Ways to Meet Jesus

How did you first meet Jesus?

Maybe that sounds like a weird question. Jesus is in heaven, and you’re here on earth. But you know what I mean, don’t you? How did you first meet Jesus? How did you first come to know that God sent his one and only Son to the earth and that this Son grew to give his life for yours on the cross?

The answer is a little different for each one of us. But if each of us were to take the mic and answer the question we'd also see some similarities and patterns. We see those similarities and patterns here in John 1, as we read about the very first followers of Jesus. And all four introductions to Jesus are different. Let's look at the first one.

Andrew. The Gospel of John tells us that Andrew was the first person to follow Jesus. But how did Andrew first meet Jesus? Here's a clue. What is the second verb in verse 37? **"Followed."** Andrew heard about Jesus from his teacher, John the Baptist, and then took the initiative to follow Jesus himself. And that's one way that people can first meet Jesus. They hear about him and they make the effort to learn more about him themselves. Did any of you meet Jesus that way? If you didn't maybe you know someone who did. Both of my parents met Jesus that way in their childhoods.

My dad had heard about Jesus from his mom and my grandmother – two good Presbyterian women. But he wanted to know more than what I was occasionally hearing in church. So he got a **teen Bible**, at the time called "The Living Bible" (This is exactly what it looked like.) And he read this Bible all on his own. On my own! A teenager reading the Bible on his own! Can you imagine that? He actually even remembers going on vacation one summer with his family and reading his Living Bible in the car on the way to who knows where. He couldn't get enough of it. He met Jesus for himself in that Bible. And then later in his teenage years, his family moved from New Jersey to below Pittsburgh, and

he started going to a Methodist church all on his own – because a beautiful older girl next door invited me (what teenage boys will do for the attention of a beautiful gal!) And he met Jesus even more there. Then later again in his teenage years, he moved again, this time north of Pittsburgh, and he started going to a youth group there on my own. And he met Jesus even more. That Bible that he met Jesus in is now on my shelf in my office since my dad gave it to me during college – a time when I was finding out more about Jesus on my own too. It's a special treasure to me.

My mom has different but similar story. She is the second oldest of 5 siblings and the only girl. Her mom and dad would have described themselves as Christians but they didn't always go to church regularly. However there were neighbor kids who attended the Methodist church a couple miles away and so my mom remembers going to church with them all on her own. She was interested in church and Jesus from a young age, but she took the initiative to wake up on Sunday's, get dressed, and go to church with her neighbors. That's how she originally met Jesus. Later in life, that's the church she consistently took me to and where I met Jesus. I'm very grateful she took an interest in Jesus and sought him out on her own.

Some people naturally want to know more about Jesus and church. So, like Andrew, during my mom and dad's teenaged years, they followed him on their own. And the rest is history. That's the first way to meet Jesus that is shown in our scripture reading.

Then there's Simon Peter. How did he first meet Jesus? Let's look at verse 41.

Simon Peter first met Jesus through the introduction of his brother, Andrew. And that may be how you first met Jesus too. In fact, it's how most people do! **Did you know** that studies show that over 80% of all Christians first met Jesus through the influence of a relative or friend who knew him first. Because this is the usual way to meet Jesus, because this is so important, I want to return to this at the end of the sermon, so let's put a pin in that for a few moments.

Let's look at the next disciple in this morning's scripture lesson, there's Philip. If we look again at verse 43 we'll see how he first met Jesus. And it's pretty cool - Jesus found him! It says that the next day, after hanging out the day before with Andrew and then meeting Simon Peter, the next day Jesus walked up north, back home to Galilee. When he got there it says:

Finding Philip, he said to him, "Follow me."

Jesus found Philip! And then Philip followed him! He left everything he had going on in his life and he followed this brand new rabbi from Nazareth. But his following was a response to first being found. Jesus found him. **And that's a** third way to first meet Jesus.

Here's a pop quiz question to see if you're awake – what other REALLY famous apostle had the same thing happen to him? This man wasn't looking for Jesus (**#1**). And no one was introducing him to Jesus (#2). But, bam! One day, Jesus found him. Who am I thinking of? **Paul!** On the same day that Paul was

traveling to Damascus, Syria to actually imprison some Christians that he heard were in that city, Jesus (who was in heaven by this time) came to Paul in a blinding vision on the city road. Remember? You can read about that in Acts 9.

Does this kind of thing still happen today? Does Jesus (who is in heaven) still appear to unbelievers today? He sure does! And this seems to especially be happening in middle eastern countries where the Islamic faith is dominant. Sometimes when there is no other way for someone to meet Jesus, Jesus finds them and miraculously introduces himself to them.

Is that how you first met Jesus? If it is, I'd really love to have lunch with you some day and hear about it. Yes, Jesus still comes to unbelievers today, as he came to Paul. And this is why we should never stop praying for the people we love who aren't Christians yet. Even though our best efforts to introduce them to Jesus (like the #2 example) may not have yielded fruit yet, don't stop praying for their salvation. Jesus MAY just come to them himself. It happens all around the world, every day! And hopefully (if he does) that person you've been praying for will say, "Yes" to him too.

Finally, there's good old Nathanael in our scripture lesson. Philip tries to introduce him to Jesus when he says, **"We've found the one Moses wrote about."** Totally convinced that Jesus is Jews' long awaited Messiah, he tells Philip that this **"Jesus of Nazareth"** their scriptures (today what we know as the Old Testament) are all pointing to.

But Nathanael won't have any of it. As soon as he hears the word "Nazareth" he stops listening.

"Nazareth? Nazareth? Can anything good come from there?"

Kind of reminds me of when I first moved to Kentucky to go to seminary. I had never been around so many people who had southern accents and to be honest I always thought that having a southern accent meant you were uneducated or lazy – a stereotypical hillbilly. That sounds terrible, but that was what I thought! It wasn't until I moved down to Kentucky and met amazing Kentuckians who are nurses and school teachers and pastors and mechanics who were so smart and so hard working that they proved my stereotype completely wrong.

Well, this is how Nathanael felt about people from Nazareth. He was prejudice against them. He pre-judged them all. And to make matters worse, Nathanael was from Cana, just 4 miles away from Nazareth. Just 4 miles! That doesn't happen today, does it? People from Waterford don't have any prejudices against people from General McLane, do they? Or against people from the east side of Erie, do they?

When you study the history of Nazareth and Cana back then it turns out that Nathanael had two reasons not to like people from Nazareth. First, a Roman army garrison was stationed there. And we know how much the Jews hated the Romans – so it's natural for them to hate anyone from a town that had a Roman garrison in it. Second, there was some question in Nathanael's culture about the

moral character of people from Nazareth – kind of like how we might feel today about people who live on Bourbon Street, in New Orleans (if you know what I mean).

For whatever reason, Nathanael was what we call a “bigot” against Nazarenes. And he wasn’t having anything to do with this Jesus if he was from Nazareth.

So, what could Philip do? He wanted to introduce him to Jesus, but Nathanael was prejudiced against anyone from Nazareth. What could Philip do? I love what he did. It’s my favorite part of the story. Verse 46 –

“Come and see,” Philip said.

Come and see. This is the 4th and final example of how someone can meet Jesus: **Experimentation**.

Isn’t that what Philip did here? **Come and see**. What’s that? That’s an invitation for Nathanael to do a little experiment. Come and see Jesus for yourself. If you don’t like him, if the experiment is a failure, walk away. No biggy.

Do you know someone whom you love, but who isn’t a Christian yet? And despite your best efforts, they have some prejudice against Jesus and won’t let you introduce him to them? Why not offer them the same exact experiment? Come and see.

But how can people **“come and see”** Jesus today, when he’s in heaven and we’re down here? I can think of three ways. You might think of more.

First, they can begin using the means of grace (worship, prayer, Bible study) and SEE what effect they have on their life. My guess is that this experiment will have tremendous success – if they will try it. Will you help them? Is their becoming a Christian a priority in your life?

Second, they can actually experiment with letting Jesus “call the shots” in their life. How? By always asking themselves before they do anything, “What would Jesus do?” Then, to conduct this experiment, they try to do what Jesus would do. And, like any good scientist, they observe the results. My guess is that this experiment will have tremendous success. Will you help them? Is their becoming a Christian a priority in your life?

Third, despite their doubts, they can pretend for now that they have faith that Jesus died for their sins, and that even their worse sins have been forgiven and forgotten by God. Maybe this sounds strange to you, but guess what - **John Wesley**, the founder of the original Methodist movement, conducted this experiment himself. In a time of extreme spiritual doubt and despair a wise spiritual counselor told him to act as if he had faith until he actually did have faith. It worked for John Wesley, or we wouldn't be sitting in a Methodist church today! And I believe it will work for your pre-Christian friend, or family member. Will you help them try it? Is their becoming a Christian a priority in your life?

Actually, let me broaden that question. **Is it a priority** in ALL of our lives, that the people whom we love come to know Jesus as their Lord and Savior?

The Bishop of the Missouri Conference, Robert Schnase (Shnay-zee), told a story of the time when he was at a car rental store in Missouri. He struck up a conversation with the young clerk behind the counter when the clerk asked him what he did for a living.

The Bishop said, "I work with the United Methodist Church."

The clerk said, "Really? I used to go to a Methodist church when I was a kid."

The Bishop asked, "Is that so? Where do you go to church now?"

The man said, "Well, my girlfriend and I have lived here for 3 years now. And we've been talking about going to church a lot. But we never seem to make it."

The Bishop asked him, "What kind of music do you like, if you don't mind me asking?"

The man told him the kind of music that he and his girlfriend listen to and the Bishop said, "I know two Methodist churches near here that have that kind of music in their worship. If you'd like me to I'll tell you where they are."

The man handed him a pad and pen and asked, "Would you write their names down for me?"

As the Bishop was writing down the names, a man who was 20 feet away in the back office came out. He hadn't heard their conversation, but when he saw the Bishop he said in a loud voice, "You're Bishop Schnase! You preached at my church a few months ago!" And the man proceeded to tell the Bishop how

involved he is in his church – how he works with the youth group, and sings in the choir, and goes on mission trips, and serves on several committees. On and on he went. The model church person.

Except for what? Have you made the connection yet in your mind? This man was the model church person – deeply involved in the life and vitality of his church. Except for what? Except for inviting someone he works 20 feet away from, and with whom he spends 40 hours a week, 160 hours a month, 2,000 hours a year. They probably talk about all kinds of things: sports, politics, even personal family stuff. But he had never invited this man to become a part of his church family.

It's true of a lot of us, isn't it? At some point in time we Methodists lost our passion for making new Christians. Bishop Schnase thinks it started back in the 50's and 60's. Back in the 50's and 60's our culture supported church involvement. Back in the 50's and 60's, imagine if a kid's football coach told his team, "Boys, the big game is next week. I just wish we could get one extra day's practice in before the game." What would have happened if one of the kids said, (back in the 50's and 60's), "Coach, I have an idea. Why don't we practice on Sunday?" What would the coach have said back then? Something like, "Boy, are you crazy? Don't make me tell your parents what you just said."

Why? Because back in the 50's and 60's Sundays were church day. Not that everyone WENT to church in the 50's and 60's. But our culture made it easy to go if you wanted to. Stores were closed. A lot of restaurants were closed.

Team sports were never played. Our culture supported church involvement, if that's what you wanted to do. So the church didn't have to work as hard to make new disciples. And we lost our passion for it.

Now our culture has changed. You've seen it. I've seen it. We no longer live in a Christian America. Those days are done, and they're probably not coming back. Now our culture makes it difficult for families to go to church on Sundays. There are so many more exciting things to do. And it seems like Sunday is a family's only day to sleep in and get things done around the house.

In this culture it's going to be harder and harder for us to help new people meet Jesus. That's just the truth. But "harder" does not mean impossible. It just means harder.

Of the four ways to meet Jesus, God needs us to be doing two of them. God needs us to do #2 – introduce people to Jesus, like Andrew introduced Simon to Jesus; and #4 – invite people to experiment with faith, to "come and see" about Jesus for themselves, like Philip did with Nathanael.

But here's the million dollar question: Is it a priority that the people whom we love come to know Jesus as their Lord and Savior? Or are we like the rental car worker in the back office, working 20 feet away from a guy 40 hours a week, but never talking to them about their faith?

I know it's hard. I know. All of us fear rejection. It's no fun when we try to tell someone about why you love your church and why they should come

sometime, or about prayer requests that you heard were answered, or about how they should try using the means of grace for 3 months and see what happens – only to be told, “Thanks, but no thanks.” No one likes that.

But we need to remember what’s at stake. Who can tell me what’s at stake? We think our egos are at stake. Our pride. Our self-esteem. That’s not what’s at stake. What’s at stake here? The eternal salvation of their souls. That’s what is at stake. And we always need to remember that. Heaven and hell are real places. God has made it possible for all people to have their sins removed, and go to heaven for all eternity. Jesus is that way. But they have to believe. As John will tell us just two chapters later:

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

(John 3:16)

I’m aiming big here today. I’m trying to get us to change our behavior. I’m trying to get us to change the way we help others to meet Jesus.

And I want to offer myself to you in a partnership. Here’s what I’m offering. **I would be extremely** happy to talk with any person you would like me to talk with them about Jesus and about our church. I would love that! But here’s the catch. **You have** to do your part. And your part involves three steps:

1st – I’m going to ask you to pray for at least three days about who God would like you to focus on.

2nd – I'm going to ask you to talk with them first, and get their permission for me to talk with them.

3rd – I'm going to ask you to go with me to talk with them.

Once we're there, I'll be happy to do most of the talking about Jesus and about the church. I understand that not every Christian feels like can do this. I'll be happy to do the talking about spiritual things if you want me to. All I ask is that you pray about it, ask them for their permission, and go with me to meet them.

Will you do this with me? Is it a priority that the people whom we love come to know Jesus as their Lord and Savior?

Let us pray -