

Come and See: Beheld to Behold and Beseech

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 26 December 2021

Preacher: Rev. Andrew Ong

[0 : 0 0] We hope that you enjoy this teaching from Christ Church. This material is copyrighted and no unauthorized duplication, redistribution, or any other use of any part is permitted without prior consent from Christ Church.

Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at ChristChurchEastBay.org. Good morning. My name is Amanda. I am a part of the Alameda Small Group.

So today's reading is from the Gospel of John, chapter 1, verse 35 to 41, as printed in the liturgy. The next day again, John was standing with two of his disciples, and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, Behold, the Lamb of God. The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus.

Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, What are you seeking? And they said to him, Rabbi, which means teacher, where are you staying?

He said to them, Come and you will see. So they came and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour. One of the two who heard John speak and follow Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother.

[1 : 1 6] He first found his own brother, Simon, and said to him, We have found the Messiah, which means Christ. He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, You are Simon, the son of John.

You shall be called Cephas, which means Peter. The next day, 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 of whom Moses and the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.

Nathanael said to him, Can anything good come out of Nazareth? Philip said to him, Come and see. Jesus saw Nathanael coming towards him and said to him, Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit.

Nathanael said to him, How do you know me? Jesus answered him, Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you. Nathanael answered him, Rabbi, you are the son of God.

[2 : 2 6] You are the king of Israel. Jesus answered him, Because I said to you, I saw you under the fig tree. Do you believe? You will see greater things than these.

And he said to him, Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the son of man. This is the gospel of the Lord.

Praise you, O Christ. You can take your seats. Good morning, everyone. My name is Andrew. I'm the assistant pastor here. It's good to celebrate Christmas with you.

And in case you're wondering what some of the things that I love, well, I love the warriors and I love Christmas. And I love that the warriors are in first place right now. Thanks be to God. Merry Christmas.

Will you join me in prayer before we get into God's word? Father, we are so glad that your son has come. We're so glad that there can be joy in this world and that we have hope that your son will come again.

[3 : 28] And that's good news for us. Help us to see and savor this good news as followers, as disciples of this risen and exalted son we celebrate this season.

In his name we pray. Amen. So again, Merry Christmas, everyone. The word has become flesh. That's what we're talking about a lot here in the gospel of John. The word has become flesh and dwelt among us.

Emmanuel, right? God is with us. And we're going to continue emphasizing that theme throughout our sermon series in John's gospel. But today, I want to conclude, as we conclude the first chapter of John, we're going to have a glimpse of the other side of this God with us coin.

The other side of it. You see, yes, it's absolutely profound that the eternal and infinite and divine Lord became God with us. But today's text invites us to consider the equally true reality of us with God.

Us with God. Not just God abiding with us, but us abiding with God as his disciples. Here in John chapter 1, we're looking at the beginnings of the discipleship ministry of Jesus.

[4 : 39] Now, honestly, Jonathan and I and Christ Church historically, we have tried really hard to avoid using Christian-y language. As much as we can, we want to translate terms from the Bible into our everyday common speech.

I remember sitting down with some of our past pastors, Bart, Patrick, and Quinn, a couple years ago, discussing this very word, discipleship. Discipleship. And we were trying to come up with a suitable synonym, because discipleship just sounds so Christian-y, right?

It sounds like language that's only used inside the church or maybe within a cult or in other strange hierarchical kinds of relationships. And it just so offends our egalitarian, everybody's equal sensibilities, right?

So we were like, okay, what's it going to be? It's going to be apprenticeship, mentorship, followers, pupils, I don't know, Padawans, I don't know. But none of them really stuck.

None of them really stuck. So even though I hesitated a bunch in deciding whether or not to use this term, discipleship, talk about disciples today, I'm just going to go with it.

[5 : 43] I'm just going to go with it. And if you have a better one, go ahead and email me, let me know. But I also think, you know, there's something quite beautiful about reclaiming this term, discipleship, and unashamedly using it in our everyday language to describe who we are and who we want to be in relationship to Jesus.

See, because language creates culture. And that's what I'm hoping to do here very intentionally by using this term, discipleship, to talk about us as disciples of Jesus.

This is what we want for our church. We want to be a church with a discipleship culture. This is what we mean when we say that Christchurch exists, to lead people into deeper relationships with Christ and His church through community for the city.

This is what we're truly after, the making of disciples. This is what we want, the making of disciples. You know, recently, someone who's newer to our church was having a conversation with Jonathan, and they said to Jonathan something that we just absolutely love to hear.

They said, you know, now that I'm here at Christchurch, I'm beginning to see myself less as just a Christian, less as just a believer, and more as a disciple. And that was just music to our ears that made our hearts sore because that's what we're after.

[6 : 59] Remember the risen Jesus, He didn't say, All authority in heaven and on earth have been given unto me. Therefore, go and make nominal cultural Christians. Therefore, go make mere believers.

He said, therefore, go and make disciples. Not just churchgoers, disciples. He said, therefore, go and make disciples, teaching them to do what? Everything that I have commanded you.

He wasn't looking for the growth of Christendom. He wasn't looking for an increase in church attendance, upping the membership and baptism counts, just getting people into the door. He was looking to have the formation of disciplined followers from among the nations who would sit at His feet under His ultimate authority as the master rabbi.

People who would abide with Him. People who would serve Him and commit themselves to knowing and memorizing and imitating His words and His ways. That's what it means to be a disciple, especially one of Jesus, the master rabbi, the Lord, the Son of God.

And if this intimidates you, well, it should. It should intimidate us. This call to follow Jesus in His way and on His terms rather than our own.

[8 : 09] It's serious. It's the biggest and most important decision that any of us could ever make. It's not a call to be mere admirers of Jesus. It's not a call to be mere partners or associates.

It's a call to be ride-or-die disciples. Jesus said, if anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.

Wow, right? Jesus doesn't play. Jesus doesn't play. But you know, at the same time, what I hope to convey to you from these scriptures today, from John chapter 1, is that while discipleship under Jesus comes with a fair measure of intimidation, it comes with just as much, if not more, personal invitation.

Jesus doesn't just say, you must hate your own life to be my disciple. He says, come to me, all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, and you will find rest for your souls, for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

So wherever you're at with respect to Jesus this morning, all I want to do, all I want for Christmas, is to make clear his invitation to you, to all of us, his invitation, my invitation, to all of us in the words of Jesus and his disciples here from John chapter 1, to come and see.

[9 : 34] Just come and see. That's it. In fact, this invitation from the lips of Jesus, from his disciples to come and see, it's really at the core of what discipleship is all about.

Come. Come. Like, just follow me. But it's not like, come, follow me, or else, or come, follow me, you idiot. No, it's come and see.

Less command and more invitation. It's, hey, come, follow me, because I really want to show you something. Hey, come, follow me, and see what I've discovered. Hey, yo, check it out.

It's amazing, and I'm convinced you'll think so, too, if you just see it with your own eyes. If you just see it with your own eyes. And see, this is the one thing that is, or at least it's one of the things I love about the Christian faith, is that it's not a coercive faith.

We don't seek to convert through coercion, but by conviction. Christians don't force people into the family of God. We hope that the gospel itself, the good news about Jesus, fascinates people into the family of God, because it's just the best news ever.

[10 : 42] Really, that's all that discipleship under Jesus is about. Beholding the goodness of Jesus. Seeing him for who he really is, and then extending his invitation to come and see to others, so that they might come and see, too.

Let's look at this text. Look with me at verse 35. This is how it all starts. The next day, again, John the Baptist was standing with his two disciples, with two of his disciples.

John the Baptist has at least two guys, right, who are his disciples. They're committed to following him, but look what he does in verse 36. And he looked at Jesus. In the Greek, it's this word, he gazed intently.

He beheld Jesus as he walked by, and seeing with eyes wide open, seeing Jesus for who he truly was, this prophet of God, John the Baptist, invites his disciples to see what he sees, and he says, Behold, behold the Lamb of God.

And I love that word, behold. I love that word, behold. See, this is how it all starts, with one person beholding Jesus for who he really is, and then prophetically inviting his own disciples to come and see, to come and see what he sees in Jesus.

[11 : 55] This is where it has to start. This is where it has to start. We will never be disciples of Jesus, and we'll definitely never be disciples of Jesus, who make disciples of Jesus, who make disciples of Jesus, unless we have beheld Jesus as the most amazing person that he is.

We've got to behold him. And you know, in reflecting on this this week, I was so encouraged by this model. Because lately, if I'm honest, I've been feeling a little lost as a preacher.

Chelsea even asked me, after one of my sermons a few weeks ago, is it possible to get worse at preaching? And then, the past handful of times, I have been, I have been, you know, I've been working on these sermons, and I've been kind of second-guessing myself.

I've been kind of wondering, like, what is, what is my goal? What is the purpose of preaching? Is it to inspire, to comfort, to challenge, to rebuke, to encourage, exhort, provoke, to get people to repent, get people to rejoice, receive, to laugh, to cry?

What is it that I'm supposed to be doing up here? And I imagine that it's a combination of all these things, but the challenge of getting the right balance of all these things, from all these different passages of Scripture, it's tough.

[13 : 15] And if I'm honest, most of the time I usually come up here not feeling like I've figured it out. But you know, in reflecting upon this passage this week, and thinking about, not just what I'm supposed to be doing as a preacher, but thinking about what we're trying to do as a church, and leading people into deeper relationships with Christ, and His church, making disciples, I was reminded that even as I'm still figuring out this preaching thing, there's at least one thing that I should definitely keep trying to do.

And it's to get us all to behold. To behold the Lamb of God. To see Him for who He really is. You know when I often say, this is the gospel. That's what I'm trying to do.

I'm trying to say, behold. I'm saying, come and see. Check this good news out. Behold. The good news of Jesus. And so it's been helpful for me as a preacher to remember that I'm not coming up here primarily as a preacher.

But more importantly, as a disciple maker. As a disciple of Jesus who wants to make more disciples of Jesus. Simply beseeching people to come and see and behold.

And I wonder if that might help the rest of us here too. For those of us who identify as Christians, for those of us who identify as disciples of Jesus, but maybe we haven't given much thought to next steps, about how to invite people into discipleship.

[14 : 39] We haven't given much thought into what to do to become disciple-making disciples of Jesus. I wonder if it's because we're kind of psyched out.

We've psyched ourselves out with this seemingly daunting task, right, of, ooh, doing discipleship. Oh, I'm not mature enough for that stuff yet. I'm not holy enough.

I'm not smart enough. Who'd want to learn from me? Who'd want to follow me? But what I want to say this morning is, hey, let's slow down. Let's slow down. And like, what if we saw discipleship and the making of disciples not primarily as seeking to become a teacher or some Jedi master, right?

What if we saw discipleship more as a way of life? What if we saw it as being a person who is intentional about being invitational and beckoning others to simply come and see, to come and behold Jesus for who he truly is?

And sure, that might look like what we have in our minds, you know, someone leading a Bible study and investing in a group of people on a regular basis and keeping each other accountable. But it could also just look like conveying to a friend, a coworker, a neighbor, someone in our family, our kids, whether Christians or not, just conveying to anyone and everyone in fresh and creative ways what we see in Jesus.

[16 : 01] And hoping that they too will see what we see in Jesus as amazing as we believe it to be. Just living an invitational life, inviting people to see the beautiful things we see in Jesus.

Like really, discipleship, it can come in baby steps. The key is this simple invitation to come and see Jesus for who he really is.

I mean, look, look at verse 41. This is all that one of the first disciples, Andrew, really does, right? He just makes an introduction. That's all he does. We don't know him for much else in church history, in the rest of the scriptures.

I asked my parents, why did you name me Andrew? Because I was actually named after this disciple. So I texted them earlier this week and this is what my mom texted me. She said, at the time, we really wanted to name you after a person in the Bible that wasn't a bad person, you know, like Satan or Judas.

So thanks, Mom, right? But then my mom said, however, since then we've learned much about the disciple Andrew and feel that it was providential since he introduced Peter to Jesus.

[17 : 12] And that is how we see God calling you to introduce others to the gospel. See, introductions, introductions to Jesus, just bringing people to come and to see.

Andrew isn't a big, huge character in the Bible, but with no invitation from Andrew to Peter, we don't get Peter. We don't get Peter. So the question for us, for those of us who identify as disciples of Jesus today, is who in our lives might we invite to come and see Jesus?

And might it be that they're closer to us than we think? I mean, again, for Andrew in verse 41, I love how it says, he first found his own brother. He went to his family. Easy.

And as it says in verse 42, he brought him to Jesus. He brought him to Jesus. And I know that's for some of us, we might have these decades-long, complicated family dynamics and tense and complicated things going on there.

But at the end of the day, it's still family. And how better to love those whom we're called to love most than to invite them to come and see Jesus? Or maybe parents, are we at least doing this with our kids?

[18 : 21] Are we bringing our kids to Jesus? Do our kids see us beholding the Lamb of God? Do they see us opening up our Bibles? Do they see us talking to God? Do they see us singing to God?

And are we inviting them into that to come and see? Discipleship is actually best done within families. So again, who are the people in our families, whether Christians or not, that we want to bring to Jesus?

I've been really encouraged by two guys in the discipleship group that I have here. One has just recently invited his brother to lessons and carols and to church and is often praying for his brother, asking him how he can pray for him.

He's inviting him to come and see. And another guy is about to start reading Mere Christianity with his brother, wanting to invite him as well to come and see. This is come and see discipleship.

This is it. At work, in everyday life, in our families. And even outside our families, come and see discipleship is for everyone. Even for those we might not expect to be very interested in Jesus.

[19 : 24] Philip was a Greek name. Who would have thought he'd be interested in following this Jewish rabbi? Or Nathaniel, we might consider him an antagonistic skeptic who might have something against where Jesus was from, right?

Can anything good come from Nazareth? But notice how Philip handles this skepticism. He doesn't feel like he needs to have all the answers for his friend Nathaniel. He isn't fazed by the skepticism.

Philip has had his own life-changing encounter with Jesus. And he's convinced that Nathaniel will too if he will just come and see Jesus for who he really is. It's the easiest job in the world.

I don't need to convince people of anything. They just need to encounter Jesus. Jesus. Some of you might remember a couple weeks ago when I was preaching and I mentioned how we had a newcomer come to my house who had some questions and we had popcorn chicken and watered-down boba together.

And he had these tough theological questions. But, you know, he actually first asked these tough theological questions to Josh Lynn, actually, one of our youth mentors. And Josh, I love how Josh was humble enough to admit that he didn't know how to answer these questions, but he was also bold and confident enough in his own encounter with Jesus to not be fazed by his inability to answer these skeptical questions.

[20 : 46] Instead, Josh just invited him, this newcomer, to investigate these questions together with his pastor. Like Philip, Josh's priority was not answering a skeptic's questions, but his priority was inviting him to come and see.

And also like Philip, Josh wasn't just saying, hey, go and see. He said, come, as in I am coming with you. And Josh picked up the boba, and he picked up the popcorn chicken, and he drove this friend all the way to my house in Casha Valley in the middle of the day on a Friday during Leah's nap time.

This is come and see discipleship. It's invitations to behold Jesus, just like John the Baptist's invitation. Behold, the Lamb of God, right?

It's coming alongside people. It's going the extra mile. It's meeting people where they're at and taking the time to understand where they're at and what they're after in their lives. And it's doing it with genuine hospitality, just like Jesus.

Jesus invited these two guys to stay with him, to abide with him in verses 38 and 39. Why do you think I'm always trying to have people over at my house? It's because I believe what the former professor at Syracuse, this author, Rosario Butterfield, says.

[22 : 01] She says, the gospel comes with a house key. There's something really special about hospitality and I'd love to tell you her story sometime. You could look it up in the secret thoughts of an unlikely convert.

But there's something special, she says, about, there's something powerful about having people in our houses, you know, feeding them and having honest and real and personal face-to-face conversations just like Jesus did here.

Asking people with genuine interest. What are you seeking? Right? Verse 38. What are you seeking? Being genuinely interested in people as people and what they're seeking in life.

The goal of Christian discipleship is simply to help people on this quest with the confidence that Jesus is the key to their quest. Notice how when Andrew goes to Peter, he says, we found the Messiah because he knows Peter's looking for the Messiah.

When Philip goes to Nathaniel, he says, we have found him of whom Moses and the Law and the Prophets wrote because he knows Nathaniel is a student of the Hebrew Scriptures. I love how, notice both Andrew and Peter say, we have found what you're looking for.

[23 : 09] We have found it. The one you've been looking for, we have found him. Again, this is invitational discipleship fueled by the joy of an incredible discovery that's too good to keep secret.

So again, who might we invite to come and see in 2022? And how might we take steps toward this? We love seeing so many of your friends and families at Lessons and Carols and at Christmas Eve.

We hope that you'll invite some of your friends and family to Christianity Explored, which begins on January 12th. Or maybe for the youth, inviting people to our youth retreat or to our youth gatherings on Wednesdays.

Now, I know there are some of us though, maybe many of us in this room. Whether we identify as Christians and disciples of Jesus or not, who are still unsure though if Jesus is worth coming to see for ourselves.

Or if he's worth inviting others to come and see for themselves. And like I said earlier, this invitational come and see approach to discipleship, it only makes sense if we've personally beheld Jesus for who he really is.

[24 : 18] It only makes sense if one's been captured by a vision of the glory of Christ. So I want to wrap up by pointing out two things from the end of John chapter 1 that I think are absolutely compelling about who Jesus is and why he is worth coming to see and inviting others to come and see.

And the first is this, that Jesus sees us, he knows us, and he's interested in us personally, intimately, and individually. Like think about that for a second, that the Son of God, the creator of the universe, is interested in you.

He's interested in you personally, individually. Look with me at verses 37 and 39. These two disciples of John the Baptist, they start stalking Jesus, and it says he just stops and then he turns around, he turns toward them, and he gives them his whole attention.

The Greek word is theomai. He marveled at them, he beheld them, he was intrigued and impressed and interested in them. And this Lord of the universe who's on his own mission to fulfill his heavenly Father's grand plans for the world, he stoops down and has the tenderness and care to genuinely inquire to these two guys, what are you seeking?

He really wanted to know. Like he really wants to hear from you. He really wants to hear from us. So bring your hard questions, bring all your skepticism. He invites you to just come, to just come and see for yourself.

[25 : 51] Come investigate him as thoroughly as you want. He's ready. Come. This is a God who cares about what we care about. It's not trivial to him.

Whatever is on your heart and mind, whatever you're bringing here today, it's okay to tell him. In fact, he's interested. He's interested. He wants to help you with it.

That he is the creator of the universe. It doesn't make you and your concerns too small for him. But actually, that he is the creator of the universe means that he is absolutely concerned about what you're concerned about.

And he sees you. He sees us. Isn't that good news? You are not overlooked. We are not overlooked. We are seen by the gaze of God himself.

Look at verse 38. Jesus turned and saw these first two disciples in their seeking. Verse 42. Jesus looked at Peter intently and saw him in all his potential. Jesus looked at Peter and saw a lifelong friend.

[26 : 51] Someone he wanted to have a personal relationship. So personal, he even gave him a nickname, right? Kephes, Rocky, he calls him. Verse 47. Jesus saw Nathaniel coming to him.

And he saw him for whom he really was. In Israel, in whom there was no deceit. A man concerned with the truth and keeping it real. And then when Nathaniel was like, wow, how did you know me?

In verse 48, Jesus also says, I even saw you under the fig tree. He sees us. You know, a lot of commentators, they try to guess what Jesus saw Nathaniel doing under that fig tree, but there is, there's no consensus.

People make guesses, there's no consensus, and I'm not gonna give you a guess either. We don't know what Jesus saw Nathaniel doing under that fig tree. And we don't know why Jesus mentioning this to Nathaniel all of a sudden made this skeptic suddenly go from, can anything good come from Nazareth?

All the way to, Rabbi, you are now, you are the son of God. You are the king of Israel. But you know, I wonder if that's the point. That we don't know what Jesus saw.

[27 : 58] Like, we can't know, and we won't know, but Jesus knew. And Nathaniel knew. And this was between Jesus and Nathaniel in the context of their own unique personal relationship.

Isn't that fascinating? That in Jesus, we have a God who is interested in us and who sees us in our fig tree moments. These moments where we feel maybe unseen, these moments that no one else sees, Jesus sees.

And he assures us that we are known and loved and cared for and valued, not just generally, but in a unique, individual, personal way as his disciple.

You know, I'm probably over time now, but the last thing I want to point out about who Jesus is and why he's worth coming to see and inviting others to come and see is that not only is he, not only does he know us, not only does he see us and take interest in us personally and individually, but what I love about Jesus is that he is both the ladder and the lamb.

He is both the ladder and the lamb. This chapter ends with Jesus saying to Nathaniel in the last two verses, man, you thought me knowing about you and the fig tree was impressive? He says, wait till you see what I really came here to do.

[29 : 20] And he makes this reference to Genesis chapter 28. If you want to look on page 22 in your pew Bibles, starting in verse 10, he makes this reference to Genesis chapter 28. And in Genesis chapter 28, you have Jacob, right?

This guy who fathered the 12 tribes of Israel and he's in really, really bad shape. He's just deceived his father. He's deceived his brother. He's now estranged from his family, running away from home.

He's literally hit rock bottom. He's got a stone for a pillow. And the promise of God to bless him and his family and the world through them richly, it just seems impossible, outlandish, right?

But on his journey away from home, God encounters him in a dream. And what Jacob sees is he sees this ladder. And at the top of the ladder is God himself. And on this ladder, he sees the agents of God, the power and presence of God and the persons of angels ascending and descending on this ladder.

And in this dream, God assures Jacob, deceitful, run away from home, nothing in his pockets, Jacob. He assures him of his promise that no matter what, I will never leave you, I will never forsake you, but I'm going to be your God and I'm going to be with you, your personal God.

[30 : 36] I'm going to be with you no matter what. And so what Jesus was saying to Nathanael in verse 51 when he said, you will see the heavens opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man, Jesus was saying, Nathanael, O true Israelite, O student of the Scriptures, don't you see that I am the ladder?

I am the connecting point between heaven and earth. I am the way to God. I am the very sign and assurance of God's promise to be present with his people, to be present with you, with us.

And in one sense, this is amazing all by itself that Jesus is the ladder between us and God because God is our greatest need. He's the very thing that all of us wanderers are seeking. But perhaps even more amazing is what qualifies us to even get on the ladder into the presence of God.

In Psalm chapter 24, verse 3, the psalmist asks, Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully.

Now, according to that criteria from Psalm 24, neither Jacob nor any of us are qualified to ascend the hill of the Lord. Neither Jacob nor any of us are qualified or able to get on that ladder.

[32 : 05] For none of us has clean hands. None of us has a pure heart. And all of us have lifted up our souls to false gods. All of us have trusted in and followed and become disciples of lesser lords.

But the good news of the gospel is that not only is Jesus the ladder, but just as John the Baptist proclaimed, Behold, he is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world by his precious blood poured out for us in love to cleanse us of our sins and to make us white as Christmas snow.

And this is the gospel. The good news that Jesus invites us all to come and see and to behold and to be with him because he is the ladder and the Lamb for us and for all who want to follow him in this path of discipleship.

Will you pray with me? Amen. Lord, help us to see. Help us to behold. Help us to taste and see that you are truly good.

That the good news of Christmas is the best news, the best gift, and that your son is so worthy for us to follow.

[33 : 29] It has to start with us seeing, Lord. So would you open our eyes like only your spirit can and help us to come and see and to behold the Lamb of God, the ladder and the Lamb, we pray.

Amen.