

**A sermon preached by Rev. Dr. Jason Cashing, Clarence Presbyterian Church  
on January 28, 2024.**

**COME AND SEE**

*<1 Samuel 3:1-10; Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18; John 1:43-51>*

*Prayer: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be pleasing and acceptable to you, O Holy One, our Rock and Redeemer. Amen.*

I wasn't aware, at the time, that a new thing, a profoundly necessary and new thing, was beginning on that afternoon at camp. I can't remember the exact year, but I remember that I was a senior counselor, one of the ones with the most experience out of the whole staff. Also, it was a week that was being directed by the minister from my home church, whom I had known my whole life, who I looked up as an example almost as much as I did my parents; he and his family were, and continue to be, my mutually adoptive family.

And I was having fun that week. I was in a good groove with my fellow counselors and staff, and we knew what we were about. Furthermore, we all liked each (we still do), and it was just as great to be working at a summer camp as it was to be together at this camp, almost as if we were getting paid to be campers again!

But I was dropping the ball. Nothing major, and certainly not life-threatening. Just little things here and there. If it were my first year as a counselor, it would've been more understandable. But as I said, I was the senior guy; I don't know that anyone else on staff had as many seasons as I did.

One afternoon, I can't remember if it was Tuesday or Wednesday, my minister, my mentor pulled me into our own little conversation while we were sitting at a picnic table, the joyful shouts of playing kids all around us. "Jason," he said. "I'm disappointed. I expected more from you this week."

I was devastated. My face showed it, and I admitted as much. But that wasn't where he ended. He went on to tell me about the lobster.

It might be helpful for me to remind us that, as a species, we are biologically wired and culturally acclimated to avoid pain and discomfort. All of our efforts in life, whether deliberate or subconscious, are often geared toward avoiding pain or discomfort, and particularly against being in a position of vulnerability toward harm. As we grow in years, we become so adept at avoiding harm, at reducing our vulnerability, that we often don't even realize anymore that we're doing it: subconsciously throwing up barriers and safety measures to keep ourselves from being hurt, experiencing pain, or living through discomfort. And let me tell you, we have become extremely adept at avoiding pain, as well as the situations that might bring about discomfort. But while this is our inclination, it is not indicative of faithful living, which routinely calls us to grow in faith.

For instance: In the reading that immediately precedes our gospel reading this morning, Simon and his brother Andrew have just been invited by Jesus to join him, and presumably Philip hears of this invitation, being from the same village. Philip then approaches Nathanael and invites *him* to join in following the one that has been found and believed to be the Messiah. It is the invitation into something long yearned for and of great potential.

Nathanael's response, however, implies that he has been hurt before, and is perhaps even still nursing the pain of that experience. Because his response is to deflect. Rather than answer "yes" or "no," Nathanael avoids the question all together, as well as the possibility that it reflects. "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" Nathanael's response is natural of someone who has been hurt, and his skepticism is an understandable defense against further pain and wounding. He's not sure he's willing to trust again, to believe again, to risk again. His skepticism, known or unknown, was a protective measure against pain, hurt, and discomfort.

Perhaps that sounds familiar.

Back to the lobster. The lobster, as it scuttles around on the ocean floor, is encased in a hard shell to protect it and keep it safe from harm, from wounding, from vulnerability. But I learned that afternoon at camp how, as a lobster grows, the shell becomes too small, and the lobster must do one of two things: either die, because it has grown too big for the shell to accommodate, or let the shell be broken and shed, so that the lobster can grow and so that a new shell might form. But there's danger in that, because once the old shell is off, and before a new one can form, the lobster is totally exposed and at risk, vulnerable to all the ocean around it.

It can be a painful and discomfoting time, but in order for the lobster to live and grow, it must go through a period of discomfort and vulnerability. In order for a new thing to begin, a new stage in life to be realized, growth requires discomfort and vulnerability.

I love this passage this John's gospel, and the companion reading of Simon and Andrew likewise being called. The callings they receive are an invitation to a new thing. This new thing isn't even fully defined, outlined, or clarified. It just is, and the invitation is to risk vulnerability, to risk discomfort and pain - the very things we're wired to avoid - in order to grow and live into the new thing. "Come, and see." Jesus knows well the realities of being wounded, of living with the hurt, of throwing up protection against vulnerability. But Jesus also knows the connection and relationship, the kind of living that comes on the other side of that risk, and invites us to live into it. Come, and see.

On that afternoon at camp, all those years ago, I was on the edge of a new thing, a greater degree of faithful living and ministry, but I had to be vulnerable and open to the risk in order to realize it. Today, also, we are invited into a new thing. Part of me wishes I could tell you precisely what, and in great detail, that new thing will be. I can't. Part of me wishes I could guarantee you that it would be free of discomfort or risk, free of vulnerability or pain, but I can't. Neither can I guarantee that it will be easy, or without

challenge. Truth is, it might be one of the most challenging things we determine to undertake. Sounds there's not a whole lot I can tell you.

But I can tell you this: we are invited into the new life, a life of purpose and abundance, a life of meaning and joy, made available to us by Immanuel, the One who comes into the world to bring Life. That is the invitation: to follow and realize Life, and Life Abundant. This is a dream, an invitation, that has been shared in many ways throughout history. From Jesus inviting the disciples to our new and returning officers accepting the call to leadership, it has echoed and rippled throughout time: an invitation to realize the dream of a world marked by living, wholly and connectedly, in community. A dream of seeking each other's healing and wholeness above one's own protective tendencies.

We are hurt people. We don't like to think on that too much, or dwell on the reality of it, but it's true: we are hurting people. We carry with us the wounds of grief and loss, of disappointment and mistrust. In some ways, the source of these wounds doesn't matter; what matters is that we have experienced them, and we continue to carry them. If we were asked to be vulnerable and share, each one of us could share some of the wounds and hurts we have experienced in our lives. I'm privileged that many of you have placed enough trust in me to share these experiences with me, and I thank you.

But we are hurt people. And on occasion, we have hurt others and even each other; hurt people hurt people, as it is said. It is important for us to know this, and even to own this.

Because there is more for us, too. There is an invitation. Beyond the invitation lies new life, abundant life, repurpose and resurrection. "Come, and See." It is an invitation that will require much of us. It will require us to seek out and live for connection and relationship, stepping into the vulnerability of community rather than the protective self-guarding of our nature. Will we accept this invitation, and live into the calling that is before us?

As Andrew and Simon approached Jesus with a desire to learn more, the invitation was made: "Come, and See." As Philip invited a skeptical Nathanael, the invitation was extended even further, "Come and See." And now this invitation, echoing through the generations, is before us, as well.

Do we yearn for healing and wholeness? Come and see.

Do we desire connection and relationship, to know and be known? Come and see.

Do we dream of joy and of realizing a vibrant life abundant, of extending the mission and ministry of this congregation into a hurting world? Come and see.

A new life awaits, if only we will follow. Come, and see. Amen.