

Turning Our Faces: Come and See

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John 1:35–51; John 4:7–30

I know for a fact that Advent and Holy Week are the two wildest times to be in a church office. But I'd venture to say that fall programming completes the Holy Trinity of the time of year when you might find your church staff drinking extra coffee, piecing together a calendar, acting a little less than with it, and making sure every I is dotted and t crossed!

We are in the midst of the fall kickoff at Ravensworth. To be honest, even in the chaos of it all, I love the way this time of year feels. The air gets crisper, the days get a little shorter, the pumpkin spice controversy pick up, and so much more.

As a congregation, we approach this fall season with a mix of feelings. It is both an ordinary and an extraordinary fall. It's just like every other year—ordinary—as we start Sunday School today, then we have our church picnic next week, then the fall ethics seminar is just a few weeks away.

And yet this fall is extraordinary, as we all know because we have a big transition that is coming. As we look to the end of October and Steve's retirement and then what comes after that in November, there is a lot to process. We all handle things differently, but for example, I have stock-piled tissues and waterproof mascara. Basically, as the kids say, "I have all the feels." And if I have "all the feels," then I bet that most of us have "all the feels."

When Steve and I sat down to do some worship planning for this ordinary and extraordinary fall, we both thought it was important to name all the feelings and acknowledge them in our worshipping life together. It's important to acknowledge the joy and the grief of this season. It's important to say when maybe we feel a little bit anxious about change, and also to proclaim that we believe in the steadfastness of God. And it's important that we do this work together as a church committed to one another and to our God who calls us.

Today we begin this new series, *Turning Our Faces*. We commit to turning toward the change that is coming and not avoiding it, but instead leaning into it. If we try to avoid it, we will miss the beauty of these moments that will lift us in the coming days. So together, we are turning our faces to all that is to come.

The texts that we'll look at in worship for these six weeks all have something to do with transition and change. We'll talk about grief and joy, the invitation from Jesus to come and see what it means to follow him, the gushy pastoral words of Paul to the Philippians, the people returning to Jerusalem after Exile in the book of Ezra, the earliest Jesus followers in the book of Acts who must have had whiplash from all the change, and finally, an invitation to center ourselves at the table of Jesus where we make our home.

This morning's passage is from the Gospel of John. It might seem like an odd one to choose, but it's all about an invitation that Jesus made to his disciples. Jesus asks some

very Jesus-y questions, and gives no Jesus answers. Basically, this is classic Jesus and the heart of his message.

In this first chapter of the Gospel of John, we have the famous words about the beginning that the Word has been with God since the beginning and that the Word of God put on flesh and moved into the neighborhood. John the Baptist had been on the scene for awhile and had his own disciples. Since this gospel is different from our other three, we hear of events in unique ways. For example, in John's gospel, John the Baptist is out and about and he told his disciples that he saw the Spirit descend on Jesus from heaven like a dove. When John didn't know what it was, he asked Jesus, and Jesus told him it was the Spirit of God. For Jesus, everything is about to change. This is the beginning of his ministry, he's inviting others to join him, but who even knew what the future held?

The very next day John the Baptist was standing with two of his disciples and Jesus passed by them—remember when God passed by Moses—anyway, Jesus passed by and John on the spot said, “Look, here is the Lamb of God!” This proclamation led his two disciples to turn and follow Jesus.

Jesus must not have been expecting anything by his cousin's boisterous proclamation, but when he turned around those two disciples were on his heels down the rocky road. Are you ready for what Jesus asked them?

He turned around and said, “What are you looking for?”

Jesus asked these new followers, “What are you looking for?” He asked them before he told them anything.

They replied with a question. “Teacher, where are you staying?” What a weird thing to say to Jesus!! But then, when we become Greek scholars for a moment, we understand there is great depth to their question. Their question is actually, “Teacher, where are you abiding?”

In fact, all throughout the Gospel of John, when we read “staying” or “see” most of the time it means “abide.” Tuck that one away.

As the two ask Jesus where he is abiding, I imagine the sides of Jesus' mouth turning up a little bit with curiosity about these two new followers.

Jesus' response was simple, “Come and see.”

Actually, since we are Greek scholars now, we know what Jesus was saying was, “Come and abide.”

This question and then the invitation from Jesus is so simple. It's an invitation to a transformational walk on the Way. These two disciples were actually right behind Jesus on a road when he invited them to come and abide. I find the imagery of a road, or perhaps a river, to be helpful as we consider this wild ride of following after Jesus of Nazareth.

Jesus invited these disciples to a new way of living—living together in community, living with God at the center, and discarding the pieces of faith that have been co-opted either by well-meaning people or by forces that seek power.

Come and see. Come and see what he's all about. Don't have to memorize these verses, don't have to be perfect or believe xyz doctrine. Just come and see. Come and abide in the power and the presence.

Andrew was one of those two disciples. He went and told his brother, Simon, about this Jesus guy, and Jesus had an encounter of renaming him Cephas, or Peter.

The next day, Jesus decided to go to Galilee. On his walk, he found Philip and said, "Follow me." Philip was from the same place as Andrew and Peter. Philip came along and found his friend Nathaniel.

Do you feel like the ball is rolling? John the Baptist to disciples, disciples to Jesus, Jesus to disciples, Andrew to Peter, Jesus to Peter, Jesus to Philip, Philip to Nathaniel. There's some relationship action happening here in the first chapter of John!

Nathaniel was...less than impressed about this possible Messiah. Philip shared that they've found the One and his name is Jesus. Nathaniel said, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"

I'm sure Philip could have said a lot of things to his friend, Nathaniel. Could have rolled his eyes, called him any number of names about the way he referred to people from Nazareth.

Instead, Philip said, "come and see." Or "come and abide." Come and hang out with him for awhile and see what he's about. Watch him as he cares for people, as he heals them, as he speaks with kindness to those who need it and turns around and speaks with prophetic power to those who need it.

Come and see. Come and be with us.

Come and make decisions together, come and share love, do justice, and build community, the John the Baptist contingent might have said.

A few chapters later, we heard this morning when Jesus encountered the Samaritan woman. He sat by the well when he met her and offered her living water. The disciples weren't quite sure what Jesus was doing talking to a woman in the same way he talked to them—they were astonished. They didn't know what it might mean for a woman to carry the gospel truth. It was different—it was a change---and she was a Samaritan. But Jesus seemed just fine with it so they opened themselves to the idea too. After their encounter, the woman left the well and went back to the city and invited everyone to, "Come and see."

"And so across the pages of John's Gospel there are women and men, Jews and Gentiles, rich and poor, powerful and vulnerable, people of all shapes and sizes and

varieties that Jesus meets. And to each way, in one way or another, he says the same thing: come and see.

Come and see God do a new thing.

Come and see as your future opens up in front of you.

Come and see how we live together in the pain and the joy.

Come and see the grace of God made manifest and accessible and available to all.”¹

This has always been the call of Jesus. It’s the call of this very place as ones who seek to follow after this invitational Jesus. There’s always another seat at the table, we’re always changing, we’re always transforming and opening up to the possibility of who we might be called to be.

If we were to read the Gospel of John all the way through, we’d see that the from beginning and the end, the invitation is “come and see.” Even, and especially, in the times of transition and change, or times were tough, the call remained the same—come and see what this life is all about.

So it is for us. We are invited to come and see what this life together is all about right now. To continue to open up the abiding doors with each other and with God. To keep inviting others to “come and see.” An invitation to walk into change with all the feels, and to abide in whatever is to come. We walk on the Way together, as the people of God in this place.

Come and see—there is love, and justice, and community here. God is with us.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

¹ Karoline Lewis, *Gospel of John*.