

Come & See [Scott Kinder-Pyle]

John 1:29—42; Isaiah 49:1—7

People are following. Today, perhaps more than ever, people are following—and if you’re not following somebody’s *Facebook* feed, or somebody’s podcast, or somebody’s social media brand, man, it would seem, you’re not anybody. Of course, looking around Northwood this morning, I’m not seeing any Internet addicts. As far as I know, the people here are not clicking on their Google links, looking up every jot and tittle of information. And yet, following is in our blood. Following is how we roll. And if we’re not consciously following some person, some brand, some news story gone-viral, the presumption may be that we need to be one’s who are followed. Either way, out of a need to belong, or a need to be in the loop, people are following.

And yet, I’d like to point out something that’s fairly obvious, although fairly awkward, in today’s gospel reading. Initially, according to John, chapter one, Jesus himself has not asked for followers. Two of the group surrounding John the Baptist do go after “***the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.***” But he never overtly recruits them. A blind, blanket following, it seems, is not the point. On the contrary, when the two former followers of John find themselves on the heels of Jesus, he turns to face them—“***What are you looking for?***” And it must have startled them because all they can think to say is, ahh: “***Where are you staying?***” And in reply, please notice, this one upon whom the Spirit has descended “***like a dove***” will not give them an address. He doesn’t answer with coordinates: *around the block from the synagogue, in that little thatched-roof house next to the fish market, beneath that fig tree, down in that foxhole...* Instead, quite curiously, he says, “***Come and see!***”

So, although I would argue that Jesus never strategically seeks out followers, his invitation does occur in the midst of the human tendency to jump on the bandwagon, and sometimes blindly. For example—when I was about eight years old, my mother and father took me to this grocery store in our neighborhood. It was an ACME Market affiliate; a franchise known as *The Super Saver*—and I went there, dutifully following, and following up every aisle and around every display for *Captain Crunch* and *Count Chocula*. And so, my Dad, was going up an aisle of fresh fruits, and standing next to a bin, full of grapes, he grabbed one and plunked it into his mouth. And then, looking around furtively, he grabbed another off the stem and ate it. I watched him do this, and noticed how it didn't seem as if he was going to put the grapes in the cart and take them to the cashier for payment. He never uttered the words, "**Come and See,**" but I saw... Fast-forward now one week after my father purloined the grapes from the *Super Saver*; and my friend, Bruce Squire, and I are walking the railroad tracks to the same store. Neither of our parents are in sight. The store is bustling. No one seems to be watching. We enter the aisle where bins and bins of candy are available for the taking. I tell Bruce, "Watch this," and proceed to grab a handful of caramels. He follows my lead; and as we're hightailing it through the exit doors, a self-righteous bag boy corrals us by the scruff of our necks and marches us to the back office of the Super Saver, where the Supervisor would pass judgment. Now, I'm not proud of this, but on the way to that nerve-wracking interrogation, I had spit out all the caramel candy and tossed all the incriminating candy wrappers. They would have nothing on me. And then, standing next to Bruce, pleading my innocence, I open my mouth and turn my pockets inside-out. My friend then looks at me with shock and scorn, and he says, "He did! He did take some! He did! I was just following him!"

Now, I don't have to tell you that people follow other people—and people follow impulses and influences—for all kinds of reasons. Even here. Even here a proverb written in the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah may resonate with some of you: "***The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge.***" And, let me be clear, nothing in such verses would, to my mind, absolve children of responsibility for their own actions. But it is to say that we affect one another; we influence one another; we inhibit one another; and practice peer-pressure together. And the question that John's Gospel raises this morning goes like so: *DOES JESUS OPERATE LIKE THIS?* That is, do people legitimately come to faith in Christ because their parents forced them to? Do people legitimately come to faith in Christ because their friends said, 'Unless you believe, I'm not going to be your friend anymore?' Do people genuinely experience the love of God because some business or some government declares a fringe benefit or a discount or a tax credit to those who believe? I don't think so. And my reasons relate to "***Come and See!***"

A few months ago I was preparing for a poetry reading at *Salem Lutheran Church*, and on the windows of that church is a rainbow; and the rainbow overlaid the symbol of Christ's crucifixion, the cross. Anyway, as we were preparing the gymnasium for the reading with a keg of home-brewed beer and some spare ribs and a podium with a microphone, this man came to the door and asked to speak with the pastor. I obliged, and he proceeded to walk me out to the windows with the rainbow and the cross; and I thought, 'Here we go! He's going to yell at me for supporting Gay, Lesbian and Transgender people who come to our church. But no! Instead, he pointed to this old, discarded can of beans with cigarette butts in it. And he said, "Does this church support smoking?"

Well, I wonder if you can imagine my response. I said, “Look! My father died of a heart attack, related to his smoking a pack of *Marlboro*’s every day for forty years. And if we can have people who smoke come to this church building and talk about their Higher Power and breaking free of their addictions, maybe Jesus is there. And I believe he is.” Now, of course, that wasn’t enough to satisfy this man. But what I’ll say to you this morning, based on this passage, is that Jesus had no pre-conditions to his “***Come and See!***”

Who is it we think we’re following? *Jesus—the NON-SMOKER? Jesus—the Savior Who Just Happens to be Against Everything that I’m Against? Jesus—the Son of God Who Just So Happens to Conveniently Agree with Everything that I Agree With?* The Jesus of John’s Gospel is the Lamb of God whose ego does not need people to follow him. The Jesus of John’s Gospel wants CURIOSITY. (And if anything should impede or mitigate or thwart that *Come-and See Curiosity*—anything like a prohibition against cigarette butts outside the front door of a church, that’s a problem.

And here’s another problem. Jesus looks at Simon, son of John, and gives him a name. And the name in the native language of Aramaic is *Cephas*, which means *Rock*, and which is translated into Greek as *Petros*, which means little stone. And you say, ‘*So far, so good. I understand the symbolism: Simon Peter is a rock-solid, stone-faced kind of guy. He doesn’t budge. He’s stubborn. His faith is un-changing and reliable...*’ But might there be a problem here with this interpretation? Aren’t rocks changeable? Aren’t they able to change and, over time, to be transformed... even by something as simple and free-flowing as water?

Just last night, Sheryl and I returned from a trip to Arizona, where she had a meeting of the Trustees of *Whitworth University*; and I was her plus-one. And since it was my birthday on Thursday, we also added a drive to the *Grand Canyon*, about three hours from Phoenix. And, if you don't mind, let me tell you about the juxtaposition of my experience. On the one hand, there were other pastors, doctors, lawyers, prominent businessmen and entrepreneurs planning and praying fervently for the institution. And what they discerned at the meeting was their God-given capacity to change and to be changed in order to reach this generation of young people. On the other hand, however, we hiked on the rim of a mighty abyss; and there were rocks over 1.8 billion years old. Layers upon layers of Paleozoic sandstone, prehistoric limestone, slab upon slab of shale and sheer vertical cliffs. And even though everything seemed so permanent, immovable and unchanging, every tour guide and park ranger reinforced the reality. The reality of the rock formations in the Grand Canyon is that they are changing as we speak. And that, as we speak the waters of the Colorado River are digging the abyss deeper and deeper.

So, let's return to Simon—whom Jesus merely looks at—and before Simon has said or done a thing—Jesus calls him *Rock* or *Stone*. He's going to change. If he stays with Jesus—as Jesus has promised to stay with him—Rock is going to erode, shift shape and change. And interestingly enough, in Matthew's Gospel, chapter 16, Jesus will listen to how Simon Peter groans under the pressure of his own deepening faith, and he'll say, "***On this Rock, I will build my church***"—my *ekklesia*—my assembling of people—“***and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.***” And that's not because we're so rigid, so stone-cold, so impenetrable, so immovable; it's because, like the Grand Canyon, all the rocks are dazzling; and we change!