

COME AND SEE

Sermon, January 17, 2021

Texts: I Samuel 3:1-10; John 1:35-51; I Corinthians 6:12-20

I'd like to start with a fascinating story I came across a few years back: Pam and Bob were serving as missionaries to the Philippines. Pam contracted amoebic dysentery, an intestinal infection caused by a parasite found in contaminated water or food. She was so badly infected that she went into a coma; fortunately, after treatment with strong antibiotics, she was able to recover. Unfortunately, it was belatedly discovered she was expecting their fifth child. Doctors urged her to end the pregnancy, telling her the medicines had more than likely caused irreversible damage to her baby and that her life might be put at risk, as well, if she were to carry the baby to term in her weakened condition. She refused to end the pregnancy; citing her faith convictions. In the spirit of Paul's words from the epistle reading this morning, she believed her body was not her own, it belonged to the God Who would have us protect life. Pam nearly lost their baby four times during the pregnancy. She and her husband made a pledge to God: *"If you will give us a son, we'll name him Timothy (after Paul's young protégé in the New Testament) and we'll make him a preacher!"* Pam spent the last two months of her pregnancy on bed rest, and on her due date — Aug. 14, 1987 — she gave birth to a perfectly healthy baby boy, who she described as *"skinny, but rather long."* Her son did grow up to become a preacher, of sorts. He preaches in prisons, makes hospital visits, and still serves from time to time with his father's ministry in the Philippines which now employs fifty people and includes an orphanage. He also played football. And baseball. His name?

Tim Tebow.

Tim Tebow was the first college sophomore in history to win college football's highest award, the Heisman Trophy. His 2011 role as quarterback for the Denver Broncos had provided an incredible platform for Christian witness. He was called *The Mile-High Messiah (after Denver's Mile High Stadium where the Broncos play their home games)*, as he constantly directed attention to the God he so faithfully serves (*that was back in the day when taking the knee during an athletic event was a sign of reverence and respect, not protest and/or defiance*). An ESPN poll that year pegged him as America's most admired athlete. It was one of the 2011 season's most exciting sports story lines, one that caught the nation's attention and began when Denver was 1-4 and made then-rookie and third string quarterback Tim Tebow a starter. The one-time third-stringer promptly won six in a row and seven of eight, with a string of stunning comebacks (*an amazing one in overtime against the Pittsburgh Steelers!*), winning the Broncos the AFC West title. The Broncos didn't fare so well against AFC East champions the New England Patriots ... that was nine years ago Thursday, January 14, 2012, which was a Saturday night that year (*I was a little bleary-eyed in this pulpit the next morning; one of those times that I almost fell asleep during my own sermon*). Tom Brady's crew gave the Broncos a 45-10 drubbing, with six TDs from Brady ... but that didn't diminish this remarkable phenomenon of a young man who earned the admiration of a nation because of his talent and his open faith. **He wanted to draw attention to the God he and parents served so faithfully.**

(A few updates on Tim Tebow from 2020: On February 25, 2020, he hit his first major league baseball home run in spring training with the Mets, a two-run homer run against the Detroit Tigers. He broke his hand soon after, and didn't complete the season. On February 26, 2020, he accepted an invitation by the Philippines national baseball team to play on their World Baseball Classic team, as he was born in the country. His first appearance was scheduled to be in the qualifying round that was to begin March 20, 2020 in Arizona. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the games were postponed. On January 20, he married Miss Universe 2017 and South African model Demi-Leigh Nel-Peters in South Africa.)

I tell the story in part because many churches nationwide are observing Sanctity of Human Life Sunday today, and in part because it does connect with a theme running through our lectionary readings this morning. The readings today have as a common theme this call to draw attention to the God we serve. Each describes a dimension of what it means to do that: (a) In Samuel, we find that obedience to that call meant Samuel had to say some very hard and difficult things to a spiritual mentor he loved, respected and revered, a man who has looked after him and who, in fact, had raised him since he was weaned (*we believe the young prophet was about ten years of age in this passage*). (b) In John, we have on display the important aspect of drawing attention to the One Who has called and graced us. (c) The epistle lesson reminds us of the implications that once we are called, we are not our own ... we have been bought with a price, and we are to live moral lives that call attention to the One who paid that price. I'm reminded of the story (*sent to me by email years ago by the late John Combs*), of a teacher who asked her fifth grade student: *"Glenn, How do you spell 'crocodile?"* Glenn: *"K-R-O-K-A-D-I-A-L"* TEACHER: *"No, Glenn that's wrong."* GLENN: *"Maybe it is*

wrong, but you asked me how I spell it." We laugh, because we know that's not how it works, Glenn. And that's not how it works with morality, either! More and more these days people decide moral issues by what *they* think is right. But we are not our own, we have been bought with a price! Pam Tebow held fast to that conviction.

In the verses just prior to our Gospel reading, Jesus walks by John the Baptist. John declares to his followers, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" John directs attention to Jesus; that is his role, his calling, his divinely appointed duty. The result is that two of his own disciples go on to follow Jesus. One of those two is Andrew, who immediately goes home to get his brother Simon, and then brings him to Jesus. The next day Jesus then calls Philip, who in turn goes to find Nathanael, saying "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." Nathanael's response was to wonder, "How in the world can anybody good could come out of Nazareth?" Nazareth was something of a depressed backwater town in the hills. Notice Philip does not argue, nor does he trivialize Nathanael's reservations. He simply issues the same invitation, "Come and see."

"Come with me to this place where you can meet this Jesus." As mentioned in the Time with the Children,¹ studies have shown that some 80% of people who come to a new or renewed faith in Jesus do so because someone invited them to church to "Come and see." Maybe the person inviting them didn't know a lot about the Bible, nor could they explain the doctrine of the Trinity, but they simply said, "Come and see. Come and hear our choir. Come join us at circle or at 39ers or at youth fellowship or at the luncheon. Come and enjoy a friendly bunch of people. Come and see!" This is all a bit harder to do now, as many of these usual and valuable fellowship functions of the church are on hold ... but, it is what it is. In short, though, invite people to **a place where they may meet Jesus**, Who promises to be present whenever two or three are gathered in His name. And that's something every one of us can do. But to clarify: The invitation ultimately is not just an invitation to come and see and hear and take part in our wonderful music ministry, or our youth programs, or our women's fellowship, or a delightful group of 39ers, or to listen to our pastor, or to come meet a wonderful group of people, or be relieved of your kids for an hour or two. It may be all these things and more, but the ultimate invitation, is to come and see **Jesus**, Who is always present where His people are gathered, and Who is the reason for and the focus of just about all we do around here.

This is what you and I have been called to do: Issue an invitation to come and see, come and hear. In polite society, we tell ourselves there are two things we don't talk about: Religion and Politics. Why? Because both usually lead to arguments. And especially politics these days. A bit of an aside ... I'm fearful free speech is recently and increasingly endangered in our country, civilized and principled debate seems to be becoming increasingly rare. Dissenting voices are being banned, suppressed, censored, shut up and shut down ... and not just on social media! People who disagree are demonized, labeled dangerous, seditious, hurtful. We are losing the ability to have a real, honest, principled and courteous debate between civilized people. But that's another sermon. This sermon is not about arguing religion or politics; this is about simply saying in love and respect, "Come and see."

I simply do not believe people are not interested in matters of faith today; there are many who are just waiting for someone to invite them to "Come and See." This does not mean you have to be perfect (*good luck with that*), nor does it mean the church has to be perfect (*and good luck with that!*). **The One we worship is perfect, not us.** People are not looking for perfection today, so much as they are seeking hope, they are seeking authenticity, they are seeking genuine wholesomeness, they are looking for community, AND people are seeking for a genuine sense of God's presence and reality. They really are.

This is not just for the professionally religious. Whether you think so or not, there are people who watch you, they listen to you, they respect what you have to say, and they trust in who you are and what you represent. Don't be afraid to use your influence, and presence to call their attention to Jesus ... through your deeds, through your words, through your Christian lifestyle AND through your kind invitations to "Come and see." Philip gives the invitation, and Nathanael comes to see for himself. He comes to a place where he encounters Jesus. And notice what happens: Jesus sees them coming, and it is Jesus who speaks to Nathanael's doubt, it is Jesus Who causes Nathanael's skepticism to fall away. Invite others to "**Come and see.**" And trust Jesus to do the convincing!

¹ During the Time with the Children I cited church historian Martin Marty who said that one word defines the difference between churches that grow and those that do not --- the word "Invite!" Dr. Marty references a study indicating the average Presbyterian invites someone to church once every 24 years. Now that I've been here in this church 24 years, that means if you invited more than one person to church during my tenure here, you're better than average! A story circulating in the San Jose Presbytery says that figure was shared with an elder individual who responded, "I don't buy that number, 24 years. I've been a Presbyterian forty years and I've never invited anyone to church!" Now, if 80% of church members first came to church through the invitation of a friend or relative, and the average Presbyterian only invites people to church once every twenty-four years ... well, you can draw your own conclusions.