The author of 1 John reports that those who were with Jesus saw and believed: “We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have *heard*, what we have *seen with our eyes*, what we have *looked at and touched with our hands*, concerning the word of life — this life was revealed, and we have *seen it* and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was *revealed to us*— we declare to you what we have *seen and heard* so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 1:1-3, emphasis added). Our faith rests in part on the idea that even the Godhead believed that for the great plan of salvation to work, humans needed to see God in the flesh and in action.

**A template for evangelism.** In our text, Jesus, God in human form, is beginning his ministry. Jesus lived with his parents for 30 years, but the time has come to act. He visits his cousin John, the charismatic, somewhat eccentric prophet living in the region of the Dead Sea. Jesus is baptized by him in the Jordan River. Jesus then heads for the hills in the Judean wilderness, where he prays and studies Scripture, and has a harrowing encounter with the Devil himself.

Jesus is now back on familiar turf in his own neighborhood, putting together a crew for what would be an incredible three-year adventure. The first two members of the cohort are Andrew and John, and they follow Jesus without being invited to do so. Their master/teacher had been John the Baptist, and when he identified Jesus as the “Lamb of God” (John 1:36), the two of them left the strange-looking prophet and started to follow Jesus. When Jesus noticed them hanging around, he engaged them in conversation. They asked Jesus where he was staying, and he said, “Come and see” (v. 39). Try before you buy.

Then, Jesus personally invites Philip to follow him. Philip runs to find Nathanael (also called Bartholomew) and tells him that he has discovered the Messiah is Jesus of Nazareth. Nathanael is initially skeptical. “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” (v. 46). So, Philip says, “Come and see.”

This invitation is a simple template for evangelism. It was a part of Jesus’ initial recruitment strategy with the disciples. As such, it is not a bad idea to emulate the formula that he used. Usually, we work out the “come” part by asking our friends and neighbors to come to church. Which is great! Keep inviting people to join our fellowship. But what is it that they “see” at church? They see a group of Christians standing, sitting, and saying prayers. They may see a worship team singing songs they have never heard before. Or they hold a book in their hands with songs that were written 200 years ago. What they “see” may be new and strange.

Jesus’ invitation to Philip and Nathanael was not to visit a house of faith, but to the house of friends. As a template for evangelism, the invitation to our neighbors might best be an invite to “come to our house,” where they will be able to “see” us as real people. There they will see us as believers, Christians, disciples, and followers of Jesus, in our natural environment. They will see us being who we are: real, authentic, caring, loving people who follow Jesus. By this approach we are saying to others, “Try it before your buy it!”

Inviting people to worship and fellowship with us at church is an excellent idea. Our God is an inviting God, always seeking to include us in fellowship. Extending invitations is a very God-like thing to do. The “invitational model” is one we should copy. But if we ask someone to come, we better make sure there is something meaningful and uplifting to see. Our actions must match our words so that the world sees true disciples of Jesus.

Although Jesus invites Philip and Nathanael to see before buying in (“Come and see”), Jesus does not seem happy about it. When Nathanael wonders aloud how in the world Jesus knows him, Jesus says something about seeing him under a fig tree at a certain time on a certain day. Nathanael is rightly impressed. “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” (v. 49). To which Jesus says, “Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree?” (v. 49). Jesus seems a little frustrated with the seeing/believing dialectic.

There is always this tension. Jesus understands the human need to experience before they believe. In As proof, in the very next chapter of John, Jesus begins his ministry at a wedding party where he transforms water into wine. John writes, “Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and *revealed*his glory; and his disciples *believed*in him” (2:11, emphasis added). They saw and *then* they believed. Jesus knew this about us from the get-go. He knew that the crowds often followed him hoping he might perform a miracle right in front of their eyes. Miracles inspired and gave birth to faith. No question.

John even writes at the end of his gospel: “Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written *so that you may come to believe* that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name” (20:30-31, emphasis added).

Unfortunately, many of us have poor spiritual eyesight. It is not that God is not showing up; it is just that with the cataracts of daily life, the myopia of work and family life, and the stigmatism of our disbelief, we often miss the signs. We do not see God when God appears or when there is a sign of God’s presence. Which is why we sing, “Open the eyes of my heart, Lord…I want to see You!”

**Jesus invites us.** Jesus not only says “try and buy” (“come and see”) in this reading, but he says to Philip: “Follow me.” In John’s gospel, Philip is the first one to be invited and the first one to respond to Jesus’ invitation to follow. At the end of John’s gospel, Jesus invites the disciples to have breakfast. “Come and dine,” he says (21:12, KJV). This is not a typical breakfast; it is a working breakfast. There is business to discuss. Jesus gets to work and starts passing out assignments. And you know the rest.

So, to what does Jesus invite us? If we use John’s gospel as a source, Jesus invites us: to see where he lives; to observe the signs and wonders he performs; to stay and to pray; to be filled with the Holy Spirit; and to feed the flock through a lifetime of service.

Each of us must accept Jesus’ invitation to “take a look.” It cannot hurt. Take some time to think about what Jesus is inviting us to do or to be. Perhaps we are long-time followers of Jesus, but we have never really considered what, specifically, Jesus invites us to do. Perhaps we are newer to faith and still finding our way and our purpose. It is possible we do not have a clue as to our role, our mission, our ministry. Jesus says, “Come and see” — try and buy — and it is an invitation that could change our lives.

Prayer: Merciful God, You call us to follow; to turn away from our own selfish interests, and to take up our cross and follow after You, even if the path is difficult to see, or is heading in a direction we would never have chosen for ourselves. Forgive us for being so quick to question and so hesitant to follow. Help us to see with the eyes of faith, rather than from our own human point of view. Teach us to follow without fear, knowing that You are always with us, leading the way. Amen.

**Source:** Messer, James. “Try before you buy: The next big thing in ecommerce?” shipstation.com, January 10, 2019. Retrieved July 23, 2020.

**Try and Buy**

Sunday, January 17, 2021 John 1:43-51

Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

Seeing is believing. This is a bedrock principle of the advertising world. Few people buy a car without taking a test drive. When house-hunting, we may tour several homes before signing the papers. It never hurts to look. But in our current COVID culture, we can order a lot of stuff online. But what if we want to look at the product before buying it? If we go to a brick-and-mortar store, we can touch things, feel them, look at them, test them. E-commerce is “iffy.” All we have is a hope and a prayer.

Until recently, that is. Many e-tailers now allow us to “try and buy.” We select the items on the website and choose “pay later” at checkout. Once we receive our items, we log on and pay for the items we wish to keep. If an item does not fit or work out, it is returned. We try it before we buy it. Before committing to it, we need to experience it. We want to look, we want to touch, and we want to see. This is precisely what the apostle John says happened in the relationship the disciples had with Jesus. They looked, they touched, and they saw.

“Taking a look” is at the heart of today’s gospel reading. The expression “Come and see” is mentioned twice, once by Jesus and once by Andrew. Later, Jesus will say simply, “Follow me,” and at the end of Matthew’s gospel, he simply says, “Go…” There is no “come.” There is no seeing involved. The seeing part is over. Now, it is time to “Go…into all the world.” We will return to this later. For now, we must remember that “try and buy” is at the heart of our faith.

Imagine a conversation in the Trinity of the Godhead. The point is made that providing the Law did not work. Sending the prophets did not work. God decides that mortals need to see God in the flesh! Nothing less will suffice. The Incarnation, God made flesh, is a divine concession to the axiom that “seeing is believing.” God decided that taking on human form is an absolute necessity. People needed to see and touch the Divine. And so, they do, in Jesus.