

2nd Sunday after Epiphany
January 18, 2015

Pastor Michael Ewart
Sermon Text: John 1:43-51

UNEDITED DRAFT

Come and See

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Today I want to talk to you about an immensely important question, and that is: how does the church grow? I think this question will be of great interest to nearly everyone here today. If you are a member here at Good Shepherd, that means you are connected to Christ, and you want to see more people connected to Christ. You want to see the church grow. And by “church” I mean first and foremost “Church.” That is, all people everywhere on the planet who follow Jesus as Lord and Savior. We desire that number to increase. We want to see more and more people worldwide connected to Christ. That is, we want to see more and more people trust in Christ so that his perfect life is credited to them. So that his death on the cross can be consider the full payment for their sins. So that they have life now and forever. Each time one more person is connected to Christ, the church grows.

But because I want to see the “Church” grow, I want to see Good Shepherd grow. We are a local gathering of believers here in Midtown Omaha. This is the place God has placed us. This is the place where we live and work and have relationships and connections. This is the place we can have the most immediate impact for the Kingdom of God.

Because just in this immediate area there are thousands of souls who are not yet connected to Christ, we have work to do. We have an incredible opportunity to change people’s lives now and for eternity. We have the opportunity to give people what we have: a right relationship with God and the guarantee of life with him forever. The experience we’ve had here can and must be shared with everyone we know, and everyone in our community.

Now, how does that happen? What causes the church to grow? Again, the church grows each time a lost sinner is connected to Christ and receives the forgiveness, life and salvation which he offers. So what *caused* that person to be saved. Now I’m going to get a bit technical here. We’re going to go a little deep and maybe a bit abstract. But I know you can handle this or I would teach it to you. You have above-average knowledge of the Bible and I’m confident you’re going to understand what I’m about to teach.

The Bible reveals *four essential causes* by which people come to be saved. Think of these four causes as four concentric circles. In the middle, the **principal cause** of people’s salvation is our Triune God. It’s by his action, his decision, his choice, his plan of salvation which causes people to be saved. God is the principal cause. John 3:16 speaks of this principal cause of our salvation is: *John 3:16 “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son.”* God our Father loved. God gave his Son. The Holy Spirit creates faith. The Trinity is the principal cause of our salvation.

In the next circle out, we have the **impulsive cause**. In other words, what moved God to save us? And the simple answer is: Our misery, God’s grace, and Christ’s merits. God had the impulse to save us because he saw our misery and our helplessness, his loving kindness or grace overflowed him to do something about it, and he provided his own Son, Jesus Christ, and his merits

order to save us. *Titus 3:5* “He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy.”

We usually speak of the principal and impulsive causes together. God loved, so he gave. God had mercy so he saved. So in answer to the question, “Why are you saved?” A good Biblical answer is: because of God. Because he had mercy. He did this through his Son. Principal and impulsive causes... all found in God.

In the next concentric circle, we have the **instrumental cause** of our salvation. What instrument does God use to save us? By what means does he save us? The answer from Scripture: Word and Sacrament. The Word has power to change human hearts. It convicts of Sin, and creates faith in the fact that Jesus and his merits have saved us. Baptism does the very same thing. It is the instrument through which God creates new life in us and a living connection to the Lord Jesus Christ and his merits. The Lord’s Supper does the same thing. Through the very body and blood of Christ we receive, our faith is strengthened and our connection to Christ secured. Word and Sacraments are the instruments through which God causes our salvation. “*For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.*” *Romans 1:16.*

Now there’s one more concentric circle, and this is the one we’ll spend the rest of our time on today. The outer most circle is the **ministerial cause** of our salvation. “Acting or active as an agent.” You are an agent of God. Or, an ambassador of God. *2 Corinthians 5:20* “*We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God.*”

Let’s look now in the Bible at a story that illustrates how it has been God’s plan from the very beginning that we human beings would be the ministerial causes of God’s salvation.

So we’re going to go back to the beginning when Jesus had ZERO followers. John 1:43-51. So there are four accounts about the life and saving work of Jesus: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. What we’re looking at is at the beginning of the fourth Gospel, John. We’re reading the part where Jesus is calling his first disciples. It’s fascinating to see how those disciples became followers of Jesus, because this gives us insights on how people today also come to be followers of Jesus.

In the part immediately before what we’re about to read, John the Baptist has pointed out Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. The next day, Jesus came again. John was with two of his disciples but again points to Jesus. We know one of those disciples’ names was Andrew. The other isn’t named, so we can’t be sure who he was. Some suspect it was Philip who maybe was uncommitted who will be named in the next verse. So they approach Jesus and he invites those two to follow him, and they do. They spent the day with Jesus. They got to know him. They heard his teaching. They gained some experience with him. And they were personally convinced that he was the promised Messiah. How? Simply by following Jesus, listening to him, and spending time with him.

Then we’re told that Andrew, who was one of those two former disciples of John, finds his brother, who was Simon Peter. That’s a familiar name. Andrew told Peter that they had found the Messiah. Andrew brought Peter to Jesus and Peter too became a follower. Then begins the text we want to zero in on:

Jesus Calls Philip and Nathanael

43 The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. [Now, I’m not sure if what follows occurs in Galilee, or if all of what happens next happens near where John the Baptist was baptizing people. And then as a group they head to Galilee. The two are a full day’s journey apart. My impression is

that all of this happens before they leave for Galilee. Ultimately, it doesn't matter.] **Finding Philip, he said to him, "Follow me." 44 Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida.** [the name means "house of the fisher." "Town" is generous. It was a small fishing village, archaeologists estimate the population at just a couple hundred. It was just 4 miles from Capernaum where much of Jesus' teaching and preaching ministry would be headquartered. Although Jesus called Philip directly, he certainly knew Andrew and Peter since they all came from the same village. Surely they would have lent their testimony and experience with Jesus to Jesus' invitation. And so Philip also followed.]

45 Philip found Nathanael and told him, "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."

46 "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" Nathanael asked.

"Come and see," said Philip.

Philip, having experienced Jesus, having heard his truth, was so excited he had to share this with Nathanael. And how does he tell Nathanael about Jesus? He appeals to Scripture. "You know how we've been waiting for the one foretold by Moses and the prophets? God has fulfilled the prophecies! He's here! He is Jesus of Nazareth, son of Joseph!"

To which Nathanael responds: "Nazareth?! Can anything good come from there?" Since Nathanael was from Galilee and was familiar with the area, he knew Nazareth was just a poor, small village of no significance. If the promised Messiah has come, Nathanael figured he would have to be from Jerusalem, or from Bethlehem near Jerusalem, the town of David. But Nazareth? That just can't be right. He is skeptical.

And Philip's answer is one to take special note of. This is the magic phrase that grows the church. It is the one phrase that can produce exponential growth in the Kingdom of God. It's three words in all. If every one of you would speak these words to people regularly, I believe Good Shepherd would be bursting at the seams and we would be God's servants in connecting an incredible number of people to Christ. Philip simply said: "Come and see."

Have you ever thought, "Well, I know what I believe, I just don't know how to explain it very well. So I don't feel comfortable talking about my faith." Well, then don't! You don't have too. Jesus and his Word will do all of that. All you need to do is lead someone to the situation or environment or setting where they will hear from Jesus and experience Jesus and follow Jesus around for a bit.

Let me ask you this: How do you defend a lion? Let him out of his cage. You don't need to defend the lion, he's perfectly capable of defending himself. How do you defend the Christian faith? Lead someone to Jesus. Get them near him and his Word. Jesus does the converting, and he does it through the word. That was Philip's approach. He couldn't answer all of Nathanael's objections, but he could lead him to Jesus. So he simply said, "Come and see!" And look what happens:

47 When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, "Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false."

48 "How do you know me?" Nathanael asked.

Jesus answered, "I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you."

49 Then Nathanael declared, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel."

50 Jesus said, "You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You shall see greater things than that." 51 He then added, "I tell you the truth, you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

Nathanael became a follower of Jesus that day. How? Not by any convincing defense of the Christian faith that Philip gave. He simply brought him to Jesus, and Jesus did the rest.

Nathanael quickly discovered that Jesus knew hidden things. He knew where his body was: he had been under a fig tree. He also knew where his heart was: he saw he had a genuine expectation of the coming Messiah. When Nathanael experienced the penetrating truth of Jesus, he believed in him and confessed: **“Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel.”**

Jesus assured him that this was just beginning. He was going to reveal far more insightful and meaningful spiritual truths. Ultimately, he would see God’s favor coming down from heaven on earth through Jesus himself. As a person follows Jesus, more and more is revealed. God’s love is made know clearer and clearer.

Friends, if we truly grasp what God is teaching us today, this has the potentially to profoundly impact the direction of our church going forward, and the direction of our lives as well. Think about it: God has chosen you to be **ministerial cause** of people’s salvation. God has chosen you to be his agent, his ambassador to lead people to Christ for the salvation of their souls! And this isn’t hard. All you have to do is say “come and see.”

I would suggest to you five particular environments or situations into which you can most comfortably lead people to meet Jesus.

1) Starting point class. This is a casual environment where we meet downstairs once a week and examine the main teachings of Jesus. Questions are welcomed and encouraged. Invite someone to come and see Jesus at that class. We just finished a class and we’ll be starting a new one in three weeks on February 9th.

2) Weekly worship. Invite someone to come and see Jesus at our regularly scheduled worship times. But makes sure you invite to a specific service on a specific date. Tell them you’ll pick them up. Or you’ll meet them at the door at a certain time. Promise them brunch afterwards. Invite people to church. Our traditional services might seem a little odd to those who have never been to church. For that reason we’ve started having monthly “Connection Services.” Next one is next Sunday: Jan. 25

3) Our preschool or school.

4) A special event at our church or school. (Fall festival, game / bingo night, Christmas or Easter service, Science and art fair, etc.)

5) A private meeting with pastor. Preferably with you. Preferably in a comfortable location besides my office or at church. Your home. Their home. Starbucks. A bar.

Friends, can you imagine the kind of growth Christ’s church would enjoy if every single one of us were actively saying to all of our contacts: “Come and see!” It’s how it’s grown from the very beginning and it’s the way God wants to grow his church today. This week I want to challenge every one of you to say to at *least* one person: Come and see. Lead them to Jesus for the salvation of their souls! Amen.