

ALL OF THE ABOVE THROUGH THE GOD OF LOVE
"Come and See! – Engagement"
January 17, 2021

Overarching theme: In 2021, FUMC will be SENT with the peace of Christ!

Instructions:

When using this material as teacher, feel free to pick and choose the point you want to emphasize in the lesson. *The format of the curriculum is designed to have an abundance of information in which to refer as desired.*

Core Point:

On Easter evening, the Risen Christ appears to his gathered disciple for the first time since Good Friday and speaks these words: "Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I send you." Just as Jesus sent his disciples into a divided, conflicted 1st Century with his peace, so he sends us into a divided, conflicted 2021 with his peace.

John:

The Gospel according to John is written by John, one of the apostles who was the brother of James, another apostle, and all the Gospels mention their father's name as Zebedee (Mark's Gospel in addition mentions that Jesus gave these brothers the name 'Sons of Thunder'). John's Gospel is quite different from the other three (does not contain a genealogy, or any record of Jesus' birth, childhood, temptation, transfiguration, appointment of the disciples, nor any account of Jesus parables) because more than his Gospel giving an account of the life of Christ, it is a powerful argument for the incarnation of Christ. The purpose of the writing of this Gospel was to demonstrate conclusively that Jesus was, and is, the very heaven-sent Son of God and that all who believe in him will have eternal life because he is its only source. It was written to new Christians and also to seekers of salvation and truth sometime between AD 85 and 90. A key verse of this Gospel is: "Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (20:30,31). Some of the special features of this Gospel are: In every chapter Jesus' deity is revealed and his true identity of the divine-human nature and life-giving mission is underscored through the many titles he is given as well as through the eight miracles of Christ which John mentions, calling them signs. Of these miracles, six are unique to John as well as the 'Farewell / Upper Room

Discourse' (chapters 14-17); over 90% of John is unique to his Gospel. The greatest sign, of course, is the resurrection and John provides a stirring eyewitness account of finding the empty tomb and various post-resurrection appearances of Jesus. John records seven 'I am' sayings of Jesus through which he affirms his preexistence and eternal deity.

– Adapted from The Life Application Bible, p. 1866.

Reflect on this Scripture:

John 1:40-51 NRSV

⁴⁰ One of the two who heard John speak and followed him [Jesus] was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. ⁴¹ He first found his brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated Anointed). ⁴² He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas" (which is translated Peter).

⁴³ The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." ⁴⁴ Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. ⁴⁵ Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth." ⁴⁶ Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." ⁴⁷ When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, "Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!" ⁴⁸ Nathanael asked him, "Where did you get to know me?" Jesus answered, "I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you." ⁴⁹ Nathanael replied, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" ⁵⁰ Jesus answered, "Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these." ⁵¹ And he said to him, "Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

Commentary:

The verb "to follow" operates on two levels. It has a literal meaning in the story line, but it also serves as a metaphor for discipleship. Words with meanings that make sense on both a literal and a symbolic level occur frequently in the Fourth Gospel and are a distinctive trait of the Johannine literary style. Indeed, the entire dialogue between Jesus and his first disciples is suggestive of two levels of meaning.

The story of the two new disciples is incomplete until their witness brings others to Jesus (vv. 40-42). Andrew is named as one of the disciples in v. 40 in order to

provide a link to the block of Petrine tradition preserved in vv. 41-42. Andrew's witness to Peter contains a new title, "Messiah." The Hebrew word "Messiah" occurs transliterated only here and 4:25 in the entire New Testament. As with "rabbi" which is "teacher" (v. 38), the Greek form of the word "Christ" would be more familiar to John's readers.

The Fourth Evangelist places the tradition of Jesus' renaming Simon early in the Gospel narrative (v. 42; cf. Matt. 16:17-19) in order to highlight Jesus' insight into Peter's future role in the church. In Matthew, the focus of the tradition is on Peter, but in John, Jesus' words are as much a revelation about Jesus' knowledge as they are about Peter's role. Jesus omniscience will be highlighted at other points in the Fourth Gospel, most immediately in 1:47-49.

The fourth day ("the next day," v. 43) continues the call of Jesus' disciples. Jesus finds Philip and invites him to discipleship ("Follow me"). The identification of Philip by name and place (v. 44) provides a link to the passage about Andrew and Peter (vv. 40-42). The names of these disciples are among the Twelve in all three synoptic lists (Mk. 3:16-19 and par.).

Philip finds Nathanael and bears witness to Jesus, just as Andrew did with Peter in v. 40. Nathanael does not appear in any of the other Gospels and is absent from their lists of the Twelve. As noted earlier, John does not define discipleship in terms of the formal company of the Twelve. However, many scholars hold that Nathanael is another name for the disciple Bartholomew (son of Tolmai), as mentioned among the Twelve in the other Gospels. Philip's witness is in two parts. First, he identifies Jesus as the fulfilment of all Scripture (cf. Lk. 24:27). Second, he identifies Jesus in the way one commonly distinguished one man from another: by naming his father, "Jesus, son of Joseph of Nazareth." This second identification articulates Jesus' putative human origins, but the truth of Jesus' origins was revealed in the Prologue: Jesus comes from God (1:1-2,14,18). The eyes of faith know that Joseph is not Jesus' father; God is (1:14,18,34). Philip's double identification of Jesus in v. 45 introduces a tension that will run throughout the Fourth Gospel: whether those who see Jesus will recognize the divine origins of this human being or think that knowledge of his human origins is the whole story (e.g. 6:42; 7:42).

For the first time in chap. 1, testimony of Jesus is met with resistance (v. 44a). Nathanael's resistance highlights the tension inherent in Philip's witness. Philip does not argue with Nathanael. Instead, he extends the same invitation to Nathanael ("come and see," v. 46b) that Jesus extended to his first disciples (v.

39b). Philip invites Nathanael to see for himself that the fulfilment of Scripture is indeed occurring in this human (son of Joseph) from Nazareth.

These verses comprise the longest conversation between Jesus and a disciple in chap. 1. Jesus reveals the most about himself to the one who expressed skepticism and doubt (cf. the Thomas story, 20:24-29). Jesus hails Nathanael as an "Israelite." The term *Israelite* occurs only in v. 47 in John and is used to convey Nathanael's model faithfulness. Jesus may praise Nathanael because he accepted Philip's invitation even though he had questions. "Israelite" has none of the ambiguities and shades of meaning that "Jew" carries with it in this Gospel. Jesus' words in v. 47 recall Ps. 32:2 and its description of the righteous believer.

Jesus reveals more insight into Nathanael in v. 48. The precise meaning of his words is unclear. Scholars have speculated about the significance of the fig tree, but such speculation is tangential to John's emphasis here. The focus of the story is on the fact of Jesus' superhuman knowledge and its effect on Nathanael. Nathanael correctly perceives Jesus' knowledge as an act of self-revelation and so comes to faith (vv. 49-50).

Nathanael's response to Jesus is more than witness ("this is ..."); it is a confession ("You are ...") "Rabbi" links his response to the words of the first disciples (v. 38). "Son of God" (cf. 1:34) is the central expression of Jesus' identity in the Fourth Gospel, because it recognizes Jesus' true origins. "King of Israel" is used as a term of mockery and derision in the passion narratives of Matthew (27:42) and Mark (15:32) but in John it is a positive term, expressing Jesus's significance for the people of God (see also 12:13).

Jesus' words to Nathanael in v. 50 are not a rebuke but a promise. These words, too, recall the story of Thomas (20:29). Jesus does not criticize the grounds of Nathanael's faith, but suggests that Nathanael is only at the beginning point of his faith in Jesus. The "greater things" Nathanael will see will be occasions for deepening faith.

– Adapted from The New Interpreter's Bible, Vol IX, pp. 530-532

This week we are looking at a passage in John's Gospel for God's word to us today which talks about the first disciples of Jesus, how they came to meet Jesus and eventually enter into discipleship of him, i.e. to be with him, to believe in him, to learn from him, and to follow his example and teaching, indeed to imitate / become more like him. In all of the Gospel accounts, the aspect of 'following Jesus' is mentioned as being crucial for being his disciples – the 12 specially chosen ones

whom we called Apostles or 'sent ones' and many others, both men and women. Especially in John's Gospel, in this passage and others, the verb 'to follow' is mentioned both in the literal sense as walking/going after Jesus as well as a metaphor for discipleship where it means to be with Jesus, to believe in him, to learn from him, to follow his example and teaching, and to be like him. This is not something that happened automatically without them coming to Jesus and following him nor did it happen immediately on the very first day of their meeting Jesus. But it began from there and continued for the next three and half years that Jesus was with them physically and their discipleship carried on after his death, resurrection, and ascension when Jesus continued to be with them through the Holy Spirit.

Our church's overarching focus for 2021 is based on John 20:21 which mentions the risen Jesus on the evening of Easter Day appearing to his disciples, huddled up together in hiding due to fear of those who had put their Master to death, and saying to them, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." This is John's Gospel version of the Great Commission which in Matthew's Gospel is "Go therefore and make disciples of all nation..." – the commissioning to go with the peace of Jesus and bring transformation to others. But before sharing the peace of Christ with others, God wants us to ourselves experience the peace of Christ in our own lives, to have transformation begin in ourselves by which only we can bring that to others.

Therefore, even as Jesus at the end of his ministry on earth, before his ascension, commissioned his disciples to 'Go' and be the 'sent ones'/apostles, at the start of his ministry he called them to 'Come' and follow him, to 'Come and See' which means to themselves experience and know who he is and what he offers, his new life of lasting joy and peace. In the few verses before the start of the passage that we're looking at today, we have Jesus telling the two disciples of John the Baptist who were now following him and wanting to know him better, to come and see for themselves; i.e. to engage with him and experience who he is. It's interesting to note that just as Jesus invited Andrew and the other disciple to come and see for themselves who he is, the Son of God and the Lamb of God – the Messiah that John the Baptist testified to, the first disciples did the same to others, their relations and friends, in the way of inviting them to also come and see for themselves. Andrew invited his brother Simon, who was called Peter by Jesus, telling him that the long-awaited Messiah has been finally found, and Simon went with him to meet Jesus. Philip invited his friend Nathanael, who was initially skeptical when he heard that the long-awaited Messiah that Moses and the

Prophets spoke about was found and that he's from Nazareth, invited with the same words of Jesus, 'Come and see' and Nathanael went with him to meet Jesus.

What we understand is that the discipleship of the first disciples to follow Jesus was a personal decision of each of them as individuals but at the same time it was only fulfilling when discipleship was done together as several of them in a group. Therefore, the call to discipleship is also a call to community and so we see the first disciples coming together and thereafter more being called by Jesus to form the 12 chosen specially and further many more men and women, named and unnamed.

Discipleship in Community is what following Jesus is about where we realize that Jesus calls us to come and experience who he is and what he offers. To make the spiritual journey from knowing him a little, for many like Andrew and the other disciple and Philip to know Jesus as Rabbi / Teacher and as from Nazareth and being the son of Joseph, to knowing him as the Messiah, the Son of God, the King of Israel / God's people, and even more as Jesus said to Nathanael, "You will see greater things than these" and to realize and experience Jesus as the One from God, heaven-sent and the One who is the center of all of God's purposes and activity, the One who is the meeting place of the heavenly and earthly, divine and human, temporal and eternal. So by knowing / experiencing Jesus is to be transformed by him. This transformation involves a change of our heart and mind, change of attitude and judgments, our pride and prejudices. Discipleship of Jesus involves learning, relearning, and even unlearning and this not only gets us to know the things of God but also changes our perspective of our world. Nathanael's prejudice of 'nothing good coming out of Nazareth' was changed. In community with others we learn from God and each other and our hearts and minds are changed for the better of ourselves and our world and this is the need of the hour in our country and world. Discipleship in community is not only to make the spiritual journey to know who Jesus really is and be transformed by it but also to realize that Jesus knows us through and through, cares for us and loves us and by that to have lasting peace and new hope in our world. Jesus knew and loved the first disciples even before they met him. Simon would have been amazed by Jesus naming him Peter, the rock, based on what his later role would be among the other disciples and Nathanael was surprised that Jesus knew his heart of one earnestly seeking for the coming of the Messiah because Jesus saw him under the fig tree where he probably was praying as a sincere Israelite.

Questions to Ponder for accountability in the group:

1. What has been your understanding and attitude towards discipleship? Have you thought of it as something that happens by itself if one believes in Jesus without commitment to follow him, in learning from him through God's word and becoming more like him? Have you been disappointed or frustrated in your discipleship of Christ as you face struggles and difficulties in life.
2. How would discipleship in community help you in your spiritual growth of being transformed in heart and mind and not giving up? Are you involved in such discipleship; if yes, how could it improve and if no, would you consider?

Activity for the life of a disciple:

1. Remember to find encouragement for the day by reading the daily devotional from FUMCC.
2. Ponder and pray on this scripture this week: John 1:46 NRSV
⁴⁶ Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see."
3. Prayerfully approach God in asking for a deeper and more meaningful spiritual life which involves experiencing the riches of God's grace in Christ, knowing who he is and what he offers, and for guidance in sharing this transformation with others.