

"Come and See"

Based on John 1:43-51

By Klaudia Smucker

Charlie Brown was talking to his friend Linus about his constant feeling of inadequacy. "You see, Linus, it goes all the way back to the beginning. The moment I was born and set foot on the stage of life, they took one look at me and said, 'Not right for the part!' "

Abraham Lincoln went to war as a captain, and came back as a private. He failed as a businessman. He was defeated in his first attempt to be nominated for Congress, and defeated in the 1854 and 58 Senate elections.

Thomas Edison, who invented the light bulb, was told by his teachers that he was "too stupid to learn anything." As an inventor, he made 1,000 unsuccessful attempts at the light bulb.

Albert Einstein did not speak until he was 4 years old, and did not read until he was 7. One of his teachers described him as “mentally slow, unsociable, and adrift forever in foolish dreams.”

Decca Records turned down a recording contract with the Beatles with this evaluation. “We don’t like their sound. Groups of guitars are on their way out.”

Michael Jordan was cut from his high school basketball team.

Boomer Esiason said that the Denver Broncos should have cut Tim Tebow before the NFL season began. “He can’t play. He can’t throw. What they saw in him God only knows, because the rest of us don’t.”

I have a feeling that everyone here has at least one story of feeling rejected, or stupid, or embarrassed about something someone said or did to

them. Sometimes, like Charlie Brown, we don't feel right for the part we've been given in life.

When I was in school, I was often scolded for talking to whoever was beside me. One day, as my teacher pulled my desk up to hers, she said, "If you could find a way to make money talking, you'll be a millionaire." She got part of it right.

We can't help our first impression of someone. It rises up within us with no bidding on our part, and we make determinations about someone fairly quickly. This colors our view of them until we get to know them, if we can get past our first impression at all.

Earlier in this story from John, two disciples who had followed John the Baptist began to follow Jesus. When Jesus noticed them, he turned around and asked, "What do you want?" They asked Jesus, "Where are you staying?" "Come

and see,” Jesus said. One of those disciples, Andrew, then went to his brother Simon Peter. “I have found the Messiah, the Christ!” he told him. The next day Jesus found Philip and said, “Follow me.” Philip then went to Nathaniel and said, “I’ve found the one that Moses wrote about in the Law, the one the prophets wrote about—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph!”

“Nazareth? Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” asked Nathaniel. Philip said, “Come and see.” No pushing or prodding. No apologetic debate. No attempt to convince. Just, “Come and see.” So Nathaniel did. He went and he saw, skeptical all the way. Jesus, who had that uncanny and sometimes annoying ability to know people’s hearts, saw the true Nathaniel. He didn’t focus on the Nathaniel who didn’t like Nazareth or the people in it. Jesus was face to face

with this gritty skeptic, and he saw his honest heart. “Here is a man without a false bone in his body!”

“Where’d you get that idea? You don’t know me,” said Nathaniel. Jesus replied, “I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.” Nathaniel probably thought, “That is creepy!” That’s not recorded, but he was surprised that Jesus knew where he was and what he was doing before he had met him.

“You must be the Son of God! The King of Israel!”

Within these eight verses are so many impressions, so many hopes, and so many names by the people who met Jesus. Messiah. Christ. The One Moses and the prophets wrote about. Jesus of Nazareth. Son of Joseph. Son of God. King of Israel. When people met Jesus, he seemed to evoke a dramatic response from them, in one way or another.

There are two questions I want you to think about today. How do we define Jesus? And, can anything good come out of Bally Mennonite church?

When the disciples first were called by Jesus to follow, we don't know how much they knew about him. We know about their first impressions, and we know that their understanding of who Jesus was, and what he came to do, grew within them over time. Occasionally, they knew without a doubt who Jesus was, but there were many times they failed to understand him. Yes, they called him Son of God, and "the Christ." But they also called him confusing, unreasonable, more like a slave than a king, a partier, wasteful, a spender, and crazy.

They didn't have it completely figured out until after he died, rose again, and ascended into heaven. Even then, they continued to work out what his vision was supposed to look like as they prayed together, fought together, split into

different groups, and grew as a community of believers. They brought in Gentiles, now believers, but with a history of impure and unclean practices. They argued among themselves as to what defined true worship and holiness.

Throughout the history of the church since then, we have done the same.

What does it look like to follow Jesus? Ask a Methodist, a Catholic, an Episcopalian, a person from Morningstar, a person from Hereford/Butter Valley, and 10 different people from Bally, and you will get a variety of answers. Some will argue vehemently that their answer is the right one.

Jesus invites us. "Come and see." He asks us to share his good news, and invite others to be part of this imperfect group of believers. "Come and see," we are to say to others. "Well," you might say, "our church has had problems. We're pacifists. We're too Mennonite for them, or maybe we're not Mennonite

enough.” This is the thing about inviting others to “come and see” with us. We don’t have it all figured out, and others in the church who are not like us don’t have it all figured out either.

But that’s part of being church. We invite everyone to come into the messiness of who we are, being vulnerable and honest enough to admit that we don’t always get it right. It’s saying, “We love each other, we fight sometimes, but we all want to follow Jesus. Come and figure that out with us. Come and see the One we love and want to know better. Come and see Him at work in our preschool, our garden, and our community center. Come and see Him when we go Christmas caroling, or work things out when we get something wrong. Come and see Him when we work for peace in a nation that is addicted to war. Come

and see those who have witnessed the love of Jesus in their lives, who have experienced grace and mercy when they didn't deserve it."

When Jesus invited his disciples to come and see, they were far from perfect. When the church began in Acts, most observers predicted that this little group of Jesus followers would fizzle out. They never did it perfectly, and we still don't. But people started noticing things about their behavior that seemed odd. Maybe someone asked, "How can you stand to be around those people, after what they said about you?" "Well, it was hard, but we talked together and we're working it out. We're learning to love and respect each other." "I was so sick, but my church leaders came and prayed for me, anointing me with oil. I not only experienced healing, but peace and strength of my soul." "Did you see how

people are caring for that widow? They're bringing food and clothing for her children, and they are so poor themselves."

"Come and see," they said, as people experienced the power and love of the Holy Spirit in their lives. The numbers grew, even as Christians were being persecuted and put to death. Somehow, this was more important than their fear, because God was at work. It went beyond them in life and beyond them in death.

Skeptical Nathaniel could have walked away. "I know people from Nazareth, and I don't want to have anything to do with them." Philip's gentle "come and see," gave him a reason to go. "I'll go and I'll see, and I can always say no." When he met Jesus, Jesus saw Nathaniel as he was, a questioner, a skeptic, but also a man who would be a great friend, a loyal companion, and would not lie to him. He saw what Nathaniel had to offer, and allowed him to use those gifts as

a disciple. The biggest miracle in this story isn't Jesus' knowledge of what Nathaniel had been up to previously. The biggest miracle is that Jesus can take a Nathaniel and make him all that he's meant to be.

It is pretty amazing if you think about it. God, the Creator of the universe and all that is in it, not only knows we exist, but cares to bring the best out of us, out of this little town, and out of this little church. I get why there might be a few skeptics. Funny thing is, God doesn't count how many times we get it wrong or how skeptical we are. God sees our gifts and who we can become, and invites us to come and see, and then to follow and do.

If we truly believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, the King, the One whom Moses and the prophets spoke about, our Savior, than why do we doubt that God can do miracles here? If we believe that God can use anyone, why do

we hesitate to offer our own gifts for God to use? If we believe that Jesus asks us to follow and join in the work of the Kingdom, what are we waiting for? If we hear God calling in the night, do we have the courage to say, “Lord, here I am. Your servant is listening?”

Lord, we believe. Help our unbelief. Come and see.