

WPC
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Come & See
John 1: 29-42, 43-51

The Rev. Rosemary Brown tells a story of when she was called to pastor her first church. She was very excited, having served as a director of Christian education for 17 years and now feeling God's call to preach. The bishop sent her to a little church with a congregation of 30 people and a regular attendance of 18. Didn't dampen her spirits at all! She was ready to minister to God's people.

She had been there three weeks when a member of the church called and said, "Rosemary, my aunt has fallen and broken her hip. She's 85 and hasn't been able to go to church for some time. She doesn't have a pastor. Would you go to see her?" Oh, would she? She got so excited - her first official pastoral call to a hospital. She got the room number at Baptist Hospital and hurried down. When she pulled into a parking space marked "Clergy," she saw a security guard running toward her and shouting, "You can't park there! You can't park there!" Well, she got out of the car, took out her clergy card and said, "Oh, yes, I can!"

Now you must understand, this happened at a time when clergywomen were in the birthing stage of being part of the body of Christ as preachers. That confused security guard walked away angry. And he didn't even know her! And he was muttering, "What's this world coming to?"

Rosemary hurried into the hospital and caught the elevator up to the 5th floor and made her way to the room she had been given. She looked in and found a patient, leg up in traction, weight hanging off the end of the bed. She circled the bed and reached in and got her hand and said, "Hi! My name's Rosemary Brown and I've come to see how you're doing today." She smiled and said, "Good."

Then she listened to her life story. She had lived in Dixon on a large farm with her husband. He had died eight years ago and she couldn't take care of the farm by herself so she had moved to Nashville to an assisted living apartment. Then she said, "Clumsy old me, and I turned around too fast and fell and broke my hip and here I am strung up like a convict in chains."

Well, Rosemary glanced down at her watch and she'd been there 45 minutes. She remembered that they had instructed students in her seminary never to stay over 15 minutes on a first visit. Here she was, already blown it

by 30 minutes, so she reached in and got her hands again and she said, "I need to go now, but would you like to have prayer before I go?" "Sure," she said and closed her eyes. Rosemary closed hers and began, "Dear God, please be with Mrs. Morgan." Felt a little tap come on her shoulder and she opened one eye and looked at her, and she whispered, "My name is Mrs. Jones, dear. Now you go on with your prayer." She started over. "Dear God, please be with Mrs. Jones."

When Rosemary finished, she leaned over in the bed and hugged her good-bye, knowing that she was going to have to find Mrs. Morgan and start all over again. But as she left the room, a nurse was standing there and she had tears running down her face. She said, "Lady, I don't know who you are, but Mrs. Jones has been in this hospital for two weeks and you're the first visitor she's had." For 45 minutes, she had been in the wrong room at the right time.

Rosemary ended up visiting Mrs. Jones every day after that. They became dear friends and when she passed away, Rosemary did her funeral. And as far as Rosemary knew, she was her only surviving relative, a daughter in Christ. God is like that, you know. God will place us where we

need to be when we least expect it, and then we're responsible for doing the rest.¹

Notice, that's what happened to Jesus' disciples in today's gospel reading. In this morning's passage from the Gospel of John, we meet some people who will become Jesus' disciples. First, Andrew tells his brother Simon, "We have found the Messiah." When Jesus meets Simon, he gives Simon a nickname: Peter – the Rock (or as Earl Palmer likes to say, Rocky; he's like a chip off the old block)

We then meet some other disciples in v. 43. We owe a great debt to John's gospel for giving us info about these other disciples – if we only had the other three gospels, we would know almost nothing about disciples like Philip, Nathaniel, Andrew, and Thomas.

In v. 45 Philip bears witness to Jesus, calling him the one about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth, but notice that his witness is two thirds incorrect and only one third correct. First, Moses and the prophets did indeed write about the Messiah coming from the line of David, but they wrote that the Messiah should come from the city of David in the southern region of Judah. Philip seems to be unaware that Jesus was born in Bethlehem and was only raised

¹ Rev. Rosemary Brown, "In the Right Place at the Wrong Time," Day1, Jan. 16, 2000.

in Nazareth, a northern town in Galilee. There's no prophecy telling of the Messiah coming from Galilee. The Pharisees know this, and later on in John 7:42, when Nicodemus tries to defend Jesus, they reply, "Surely you are not also from Galilee, are you? Search and you will see that no prophet is to arise from Galilee."

The second thing that Philip gets wrong is thinking that Joseph is Jesus' biological father. Evidently, Philip was unaware of the story of Jesus being born of the Virgin Mary, and that, as Karl Barth puts it, Joseph was a powerless figure in the Christmas story.

Sometimes, when we bear witness to Christ, our witness may not be absolutely accurate; we may not have all the information. But that's o.k. – God can still work, even when we make theological mistakes. I see that in my own life – there are many Christians who helped point me in the right direction towards Jesus, even though I may disagree with them theologically. Being a good witness doesn't mean getting all of your facts perfectly straight, but rather helping people to meet Jesus. Notice that Philip is a good witness. When he gets a little bit of rebuke from Nathaniel, watch what he does.

In v. 46 Nathaniel listens to what Philip tells him and responds, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Perhaps Nathaniel is saying, "I know

my Scriptures and I don't remember anything about the Messiah coming from Galilee – the Messiah is Davidic and should come from Bethlehem in Judah!

Philip is a good witness – when confronted with a good argument, he responds, “Come and see.” The best kind of witness is one who brings others to Jesus and then lets Jesus take over. All we have to do is introduce others to Jesus; what happens after that is Jesus' responsibility. We don't have to be petrified of making theological errors, of being imperfect witnesses as long as we tell others, “Come and see.”

When Nathaniel comes and meets Jesus for himself, he's impressed because Jesus knows him intimately – “here is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.” By the way, Jesus is making a little joke here, a play on words. Remember Jacob in the Old Testament? Before he was renamed Israel by God, Jacob was known as a deceiver and supplanter. He deceived his brother Esau into selling his birthright for a bowl of stew, and he deceived his father Isaac when he received the blessing that was to go to Esau. So Jesus is saying, “Here is an Israelite without any of the qualities of Jacob before he became Israel – an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.”

Notice the two very different styles of evangelism used by John the Baptist on the one hand and Philip and Jesus on the other. First came John,

PREACHING A BAPTISM OF REPENTANCE FOR THE

FORGIVENESS OF SINS! John was a fiery speaker, the ultimate Bible thumper, a charismatic leader who called the multitudes a brood of vipers and who called sin, sin. He was the type of person who would feel comfortable standing on a street corner today and shouting for everyone to repent. Some people are able to share their faith in this way. Others are not.

Fortunately, this passage shows those of us who are more reserved another way to share the good news of God's love, the way Philip used. Philip shares with Nathaniel the good news of Jesus, and even though two thirds of his information is inaccurate, he says, "Come and see." Then he leaves the rest up to Jesus. We learn from Philip that our job is to do the best we can in sharing the good news, in introducing people to Jesus, and then let him take over.

This second method of sharing the good news may not be as flashy as the first method, but that's o.k. Christ knows each of us intimately, just as he knew Nathaniel, and he knows that we need time to think things through carefully.

What's your style of sharing your faith? Perhaps you're so excited about your faith, and you're dramatic enough that you can go out and imitate John the Baptist. Great! Or maybe you have a deep relationship with Jesus,

but you're uncomfortable with John the Baptist's style of sharing the good news. That's fine, too. All we really have to do is imitate Philip and tell people, "Come and see." Often, it's the difference in our lives that attract people to the faith. I love a saying from St. Francis, who said, "Proclaim the good news always. If necessary, use words."

That's the kind of witness that caused the early church in the book of Acts to grow by the thousands in a few days. And that's the kind of witness we at WPC are called to engage in. We could easily double the size of our church if each one of us, by our words and actions, invited one other person in our lives to "come and see."

Now I'm not going to lie to you: it's not always easy to share our faith. I remember a good friend of mine from high school who, thankfully, later became a Christian in spite of me. He was attracted to the fact that I had a church community, but I never invited him to come with me to church. I wasn't confident at the time that he'd experience the same things I was experiencing. So I ignored him when he said he envied me my church connection and kept asking questions about what it was like to be a Christian. I wish my response to his questions had been more direct. I wish I had simply repeated the words of Philip. I wish I had said, "Come and see."

It's been said that it takes a thousand single steps to become a Christian. Some of those steps are just when you start reading the Bible, when you start looking at the life of Jesus. Let's invite and encourage people to take those first steps. As long as we do that, the rest is up to our Lord. We don't have to worry about getting every detail of our faith correct. Even in getting things wrong, God can help us get it right. We can be in the wrong place at the right time. In trying to share God's love with Mrs. Morgan, Rosemary shared it with Mrs. Jones first. In sharing the good news with Nathaniel, Philip gets two out of three facts wrong. And in both those cases, God still reached people.

Every one of the disciples was prepared, some better than others. Jesus meets us where we are, he knows our names, he cares about us. Who can we share this good news with? As D.T. Niles has said, "Evangelism is witness. It is one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread." We have the keys to life because at some point in our lives a parent, a friend, a teacher, someone invited us, through their words or actions, to "Come and see." It's our turn now to invite others. Who will we ask this week to "Come and see?"