

## The Messiah Invites Us

☆ “Come and see.” (vv.35-39)

☆ “Follow me.” (vv.40-51)

In the Name of Jesus the Messiah, dearly redeemed disciples, followers of our Lord:

Walking one summer with my friend and fellow Pastor Loren Steele, we were talking about why new Christians are often so on fire for the Lord. He had grown up on the streets of LA, in gangs, a hardened unbeliever for many years. I grew up in the anguish of Lutheran Pietism before we joined the WELS. If you have some shadows in your past when you remember the darkness of sin and unbelief before God turned on the Gospel light of Christ, thank God for those memories. They only make your love for the Lord burn more brightly than ever to hear His voice and sing His praise in joyful worship.

Pastor Steele laughed when I asked how God got through to him. He kept meeting women in bars and was getting frustrated. All of them were Christians; Loren Steele wanted nothing to do with Christ. Finally the seventh, Charlene, also a Christian, “But she didn’t tell me to ‘get lost!’ Loren said. When I was home one summer from NLA, Mobridge, SD, Loren and Charlene Steele parked their trailer one Saturday at Christ Our Redeemer Evangelical Lutheran Church, Bend, OR. He was travelling through the PNW to find out what God wanted him to do with his life. Most of Sunday morning he talked with my Granddad; I was too young. Next thing I knew, Loren was the first married student allowed to attend Northwestern College, Watertown, WI. I was a Senior RA; Loren needed help with his Greek. Years later he welcomed me to Minnesota and helped install me for this New Mode Mission known as “New Life Evangelical Lutheran Church,” Shoreview, MN. We were joyful that **The Messiah Invites Us**.

☆ “Come and see.” (vv.35-39)

Out of the long darkness of 400 years between the Old and New Testaments, without a prophet of the LORD, shone the Epiphany light of Christ. His cousin John the Baptist, the fore-runner of our Lord, was the last Old Testament prophet. “*When John saw Jesus passing by, he said, ‘Look! The Lamb of God!’*” (TPA<sup>1</sup>) That was the second time recorded by another man named John, who won’t mention his own name at all. John mentions *Jesus* at least 243 times in his Gospel account, and *Christ* twenty times. *Christ* fulfilled all God’s promises for a Savior. *Jesus* means *Savior*. He came to free us from our sins.

We all are naturally walking about in our lives, aimless without a clue why we’re here or where we’re going. The rich and famous, powerful and intellectual, all die like the rest of us and their hearses don’t have trailers either. You can grow up in a Christian family, but if your only focus is your own imagination, your own heart, your own dreams, you still end up wandering in the dark. Our sanctification is always like climbing a mountain too steep to stop. Keep growing, climbing higher and higher into the things of the Spirit and the holy life God gives. Otherwise, you’re falling backwards. There is no stopping along the way. We need Jesus passing by to catch our attention and turn on the lights.

My heart breaks for souls still struggling in the darkness of sin and unbelief. I feel for them because I did not, could not deliver myself from my own darkness. I feel their pain! Yesterday, I caught the lyrics of a song on a rock station. A man’s voice explained why gay marriage is their “right.” A woman’s voice expressed her warm “love” for her girlfriend. The refrain was basically, “I can’t help myself.” So true. Whether your sin is materialism or greed, gross immorality or self-righteousness, humanistic activism or pietistic indifference – you’re crashing on the mountain of God’s holiness, headed downhill fast. Unless Jesus passes by, we all end up the fire – hopeless in this life, tormented in the next.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, quotes are TPA ~ draft translation by the undersigned for the Wartburg Project – John.

**“Blind guides”** (Matthew 23:16), religious leaders, immoral Hollywood heroes and politicians are as lost as the people they are trying to lead. Teenagers, ask yourself, “Can my heroes keep themselves alive? Can they save themselves from hell?” You know the answer. God teaches us. No one can save himself or redeem someone else. But Jesus can. He saw the two disciples following, asked what they wanted and invited them as **The Messiah Invites Us: “Come and see.”** He displays God’s splendor, as we heard in our Old Testament Lesson. (Isaiah 49:1-6) **The Messiah**, would not stop until His light shown for us Gentiles too, all the way here to Minnesota. “It’s not the end of the world, but you can see it from here.”

What a joy to spend the day with Jesus! Wake up with prayers and devotions – time alone with Jesus, and the rest of your day shines with His grace and peace. New Christians can be so eager for this. At the big Chong Wen Men church, Beijing they had 400 baptisms in a year, 4,000 attending on Sunday. Some China Partners came for the 8:00 AM service an hour early. No seats left, fortunately some reserved. The pastor scolded the congregation for showing up so early. Some people come to church at 4:30 for the 8 AM service! We need to set up and get ready. Do not to come to church before 6:00 AM! <sup>2</sup>

☆ **“Follow me.” (vv.40-51)**

What we see and hear, we cannot keep to ourselves. Remember the pain; share the gain. **Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, was one of the two who heard John and followed Jesus.** (The other must have been John the Evangelist!) **Andrew first found his own brother Simon and told him, “We have found the Messiah!” (which means “Christ”).** Wouldn’t it be fair to ask, “Who really found whom?” Andrew brought his brother Simon to Jesus, who changed his name to Peter. Knowing His mission to preach and teach, suffer and die to save, **the next day Jesus wanted to leave for Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Follow me.”** Pastor Martin Franzmann noted: “When Jesus said, ‘Follow me,’ he was confiscating man for himself. It brought the *gift* and the *claim* of the Kingdom to bear on man.” <sup>3</sup>

When we follow Jesus, we want others to follow Him too. This is the opposite of earth’s money. The more you spend God’s riches of Word and sacraments, the more you enjoy them yourself. So **Philip found Nathanael and told him, “We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and so did the prophets: Jesus, the son of Joseph, from Nazareth.”** No hesitation, no fear – Philip invited Nathanael.

Pray for the questions you cannot answer. **“Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?”** That ancient region of Galilee was considered **“good-for-nothing.”** (1 Kings 9:10-14) Now Isaiah’s (740 - 695 B.C.) prophecy was coming true: **“In the past [God] humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the Gentiles, by way of the sea, along the Jordan. The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.”** (Isaiah 9:1f) Philip answered like Jesus, **“Come and see!”**

Jesus could see the fruits of faith in Nathaniel –honest reputation, seeking the Messiah, growing up in Jewish synagogues. No one is righteous by nature (Romans 3:9-20). Nathaniel’s fine character was a creation by the Holy Spirit in the Word. Finally he sees **“the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”** Jesus knows him personally before meeting him! **“You will see greater things than that! Amen, Amen, I say to you. You will see heaven opened, and the angles of God going up and coming down on the <sup>4</sup>Son of Man.”** Jesus is the stairway to heaven. Nathanael and the other disciples were beginning a spiritual journey to life everlasting in the boundless joys of heaven. It all begins and ends – endlessly – in Jesus Christ.

How is your list coming? Your list of “Friends who need Jesus”? Pray for the questions you cannot answer, then say, **“Come and see!”** When God gets through to them as to us, they too will hear His own sweet voice saying: **Follow me!** Amen.

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<sup>2</sup> Pastor Joel Lintner – August 2004 Friends of China report to MN DMB after a mission trip with Pastor Marcus Birkholz.

<sup>3</sup> Franzmann, Martin. *Follow Me.* Quoted in *Preach the Word*, Pastor Thomas Jeske, ed. Vol. 8, No. 2, p. 4.