

Come and See

^{NRS} Joh 1:35 The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples,³⁶ and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!"³⁷ The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus.³⁸ When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, "What are you looking for?" They said to him, "Rabbi" (which translated means Teacher), "where are you staying?"³⁹ He said to them, "Come and see." They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon.⁴⁰ One of the two who heard John speak and followed him 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."

I used to have this band director in high school- Mr. Gryzbowski. He was about as pleasant as his name sounds. Now, Mr. G, that's what we called him, Mr. G. was not an easy person to be around. He was a frustrated performer- he'd much rather be playing than teaching. So out of bitterness he used shame and ridicule as a motivating device pretty much everyday. If we weren't playing well, and even if we were playing well, band really wasn't a whole lot of fun most of the time. But there's one thing I'll say for him- he had an absolutely amazing sense of purpose. And one of the gifts he gave us young people was the gift of seeing someone love something with all of their heart and soul. Mr. G lived and breathed music. He was on fire for it.

"Urgency!" He would yell at us. "Don't you feel the sense of urgency I do," he would demand. "You act like we're just going to be sitting here playing for ourselves all

year. Well we're not. We're going to be playing for others and soon. We're going to be playing for people who care about you, for judges, and for people who pay their tax dollars so that you can be sitting here." Did I mention he used guilt, too? His best rant was when he would go off on telling us we were like a jumbo jet. When we were being lazy and apathetic he would throw down his baton and storm off his podium with his face redder than a tomato, and these veins popping out of his temples. And he'd say, "You know what this is like? It's like we're a 747. It's like we're landing a 747, and you're the captain, except you're not paying attention. And you're going to have to go on over the intercom and tell everybody in the plane: 'Hello America, this is the captain speaking we've missed the runway. Hello America- sorry, we weren't paying attention. We just don't care up here.'" And this was like at 8:30 in the morning- he was still waking up.

Now you think I'm kidding about all this. You think I'm exaggerating. But this is what the man was like. And while he was childish and borderline abusive half the time- he cared about what he did with every fiber of his being. And he wanted us to care, too. And even though I didn't like his style at the time, I'm now really glad I experienced Mr. G.

Because honestly, this is kind of how I'm feeling this morning. This is the last day we have with the doors- they're coming down this week. This morning if you haven't thought about what doors God is opening in front of you- if you haven't thought about what it is you should do with this amazing gift of a body and a brain- well today is the day. Don't miss the runway America!

Now the good news for each of us this morning is that God is the one calling us and not Mr. Grzybowski. And not just because G was mean. One of his other blind spots

is that he had tunnel vision- he only cared about music. And because he only cared about music, he acted like this should be true for the rest of us as well. Mr. G thought everyone should love music and become a professional musician. But when it's God we're talking about- and God's call- well the possibilities are endless.

This is what's so great about the text before us today. The John story about Jesus calling his disciples is unlike any other in the Gospels. The other Gospels have this weird freakish quality to them- Jesus is almost always walking along a beach and there are fishermen and he's always like "Follow me" and they just drop their nets and follow him. And that's just weird, isn't it? I mean do you know anyone like that- who just drops their nets and follows a perfect stranger? I mean we warn our children about things like this, right? No, John is WAY more realistic. Some people just follow after Jesus- like Philip. Jesus just approaches Philip and says follow me, but none of the rest of them do. No, God figures out a different way to connect with each person in this text.

Now the first two people Jesus calls- this is fascinating. In all the other Gospels the first two people Jesus calls are Simon and Andrew as they're fishing. He just walks up to them, calls them, they drop their nets, and the rest of it is history. But not in John. No, the first two people he calls in John aren't fishermen, no they're disciples- they're disciples of John the Baptist. And can you imagine what that must have been like- how awkward that must have been? They've given up their lives to follow John, but then they see this other guy.

"Who is that?" they wonder.

“Oh him,” poor John has to say. “Yeah, he’s the lamb of God. He’s pretty good, too.”

You have to understand schools in the ancient world aren’t like schools here- where you can transfer credits and everything. No, when you found a teacher back then, you found a home, a family. You gave up your sense of identity, often your belongings. Finding a teacher and being accepted by this teacher was a big, big deal. So these two had already left their families, they’d already left everything behind. And now...after seeing Jesus- was this all a mistake?

I think this is so fascinating. You know, there are a lot of churches with very proud traditions- and you get people who have lived in that tradition all their life, whether they’re Methodist or Presbyterian or Roman Catholic and they kind of look down their noses on folks who haven’t. Like there’s some medal you get if you only know one tradition your whole life. Sometimes, and don’t take offense at this because I happen to be one of these people who grew up Presbyterian, but sometimes I wonder if it shouldn’t be the opposite? I’m not trying to run anyone off to another church this morning, but really Christ’s body is much larger and way more interesting than just Presbyterianism. To stay healthy traditions need people who haven’t been there forever and ever, they need folks who have known something else- whether it’s another church, another faith tradition, or what have you. And Jesus must think so, because the first folks he attracts already had a teacher- they already had a tradition. And while it may have been the right path for them for a season- when they saw him it was time for something new.

It isn’t easy to change paths, is it? It isn’t easy to admit the direction you’re heading in is a dead end. A while back I came across just an absolutely great book,

basically pastor candy. It's called What Should I Do With My Life, by Po Bronson. Bronson interviewed over 900 people struggling with their sense of call and purpose.

One story he tells is the story of Lori Gottlieb. Lori Gottlieb was one of those amazing wiz kids you hated in school. Yeah she studied hard, but God has also blessed her with this ridiculous brain that could ace pretty much any test you set before her. So after graduating from Yale as a Phi Beta Kappa, she had all these different paths to choose from. She wound up in TV in a very successful career, but then something just wasn't right. So she ended up taking scores of aptitude tests and answering every question in What Color Is Your Parachute and at the end of it she decided Medical School was the answer. So, acing her MCATS she received admission into every single med school in the country. She chose Stanford because they throw students into working with patients right away. This story of her changing paths like this was so compelling Newsweek did this huge spread on her. Now if it feels like a horrible train wreck is coming, it is. After this huge life change, after this huge article on her, Gottlieb left Stanford after just three months. It turns out Medical school was NOT the place for her.

When Bronson met her she was depressed and not even showering every day. He asked her what the problem with med school was. The problem? Sick people. Lori was right that she loved to solve puzzles and was good at it. She just forgot that as a doctor you every once in a while have to come across a patient.

Bronson actually asked her, "How could you forget about something like this? How could you forget you'd be working with sick people?"

So she had to do the hard thing- she had to swallow her pride, forget about the story in Newsweek, forget about all the money she wasted, and take stock. So

sometimes, our sense of purpose can come when we've already started down path and we have to step back and make a few corrections.

But what about the next disciple? Well for the next disciple it's different. For Simon we don't really know what he was up to- although we can guess he wasn't hanging out with John the Baptist. The next disciple didn't even get to see Jesus with his own eyes when he heard the news about him. No, Andrew, one of the two who changed career paths midstream, was so excited about Jesus he left John's disciples and went back home to tell his brother Simon Peter all about him.

So Simon receives the call not from Jesus himself- but from a family member. Even though this isn't a terribly normal way people receive the call in the New Testament- I think this is probably the most common way people learn about their purpose and call in real life.

Who taught you how to walk? Talk? Who were the first people to teach you about what's important in life? For everyone here their family of origin, whether biological or adopted, their family of origin taught them these things and a thousand others as well. Whether the lessons were explicit or not doesn't matter- as children we are hungry for examples, we're hungry for others to show us how we're supposed to carry ourselves. And whether our families show us good ways or not- are families are the ones that teach us this from the beginning.

Now I'm always going on about how difficult our families can be- mainly because mine was so often. But look what a positive story this is. Andrew goes to Simon and tells him to come and check this guy out. It reminds me of the incredible, the

phenomenal power you and I have that we hardly ever use. We spend so much time around our loved ones, our friends- we are in such a unique place to tell them how incredible they are, how beautiful they are, how funny. And we don't do this enough, do we?

Sometimes we need to hear from our brother, our sister, our dearest friend- we need to hear from them how incredible we are, how much God has in store for us, because we stop believing in this sometimes.

Then, there's Philip. Philip is one of those great Biblical guys I just don't understand. Jesus just walks up to him, says "Follow me" and away Philip goes. I don't understand this- but I'm grateful for people like this, people for whom faith comes easy. The person I find much more compelling is Nathanael. Now a while back I defended Thomas saying sure he doubted, but that he wasn't the only disciple. Well, Nathanael is certainly further proof of this.

Check it out. Philip goes to Nathanael- and it doesn't mean a rip that he's his best friend. Philip tells Nathanael to turn the game off, that he needs to come see this teacher. And Nathanael, he turns the volume up and keeps watching. He tells his naïve friend that he's been to that hick town Nazareth. He spent a week there one day and all you're doing to get out of Nazareth is a bad accent.

But you know- sometimes the best things come out of the worst situations- the places you would least expect them to come from. For my birthday this year I packed up Rigby and headed to South Sister. Other than utterly destroying her paws and making everyone think I was the worst dog dad in the world- we had a great trip. As good as the

mountain was, one of the best parts was the drive back. Just as I started home, I heard the words of Robin Baudier on NPR's segment 'This I Believe'. She knows exactly what it is to find blessing in places you don't expect.

She writes: I believe in strange blessings. I have never been in such good shape. I have never spent so much time outside. I caught the past three sunsets in a row, and unless I am mistaken, I will catch the one tonight. I have never felt so close to my family. I have never felt so sure that I am doing everything right.

I live in a FEMA trailer with my parents. I moved home from Los Angeles the February before last, quitting the job that had taken me almost a year of miserable internships to get, to make sure firsthand that my family was OK. Now I work on my dad's house on the weekends and at his dental laboratory during the week. Shutting the curtain on the bunk-bed area doesn't always cut it for privacy, so I spend a lot of time outside, exercising the dog and just trying to get away from people.

I take the dog out on the levee and run to get rid of all my frustration over not being able to have a job that will allow me to afford rent. I run to get out, when I have been stuck inside, reading to escape from life, not even able to sit up straight in my tiny bunk. I run to feel like I am doing something when I am overwhelmed by all the things I can't do anything about.

The reason I caught the sunset yesterday is that we have been waiting for two weeks for FEMA to come fix a leak in our plumbing. I was so frustrated with running out in a towel to turn the water off, then mopping up the floor with the rotating assortment of towels that we have hung outside the trailer, that I decided to put on my bathing suit and shampoo under the hose. But God, that was a beautiful sunset last night.

I know it might sound strange that I am indirectly describing Hurricane Katrina as a blessing, since it took my family's home and recovering from it has taken over our lives. But I love my awful life so much right now, that I find it hilarious when I am unable to convince anyone else of it.

I make less than the people working at Popeye's. I repeatedly have to suffer the indignity of telling people that I live with my parents. But I have finally gotten rid of back pain that the doctors always told me was from stress. I occasionally have weekends when I realize that I am building a house with my dad, which I used to dream about when I was 6, watching Bob Vila with him. And I am back where I belong, no longer kidding myself that there is anywhere else I want to be.

I believe in strange blessings, because taking away my house brought me home.

Friends, God comes to us in ways that may not be right for everyone- but are just right for us. Whether it means we have to exchange the path we're walking on now for another, whether God doesn't come to us directly but through another, whether we just have this absolute sense of faith and trust that everything will turn out OK no matter what, or whether we have to suffer finding God through strange blessings. God comes to each of us in a different way.

Beloved, it's our last day with the doors. Which one are you going to open this year? And what in the word of one poet, what will you do with this one wild and precious life you've been given? **Amen.**