

2. Come and See

“Some people seemed to get all sunshine, and some all shadows.”

Does anybody know where that quote is from?

It is from ***Little Women***, Louisa May Alcott’s classic coming-of-age novel written in 1868. Little Women is story of four sisters and their passage into adulthood. There’s Meg, Jo, Beth and Amy.

- Meg is the oldest, and the prettiest, but she is also the sister who embodies their society’s expectation for women at the time — to be married and settle down with family. She is the perfect ‘little woman’
- Jo, the second eldest, is the complete opposite. A tomboy, fiercely passionate, she wants to be a writer and have adventures, rather than be conformed to a stereotype for women. Jo’s character is ahead of her time, as she leads her sisters in female empowerment, which I think is partly why the book still has so much appeal today. *Little Women* is relatable even 150 years on...
- The youngest sister, Amy, is artistic but spoiled, although she grows out of that in time.
- Lastly, there is Beth, the number three child. The shy sister, the quietly wise sister, the peacemaker of the family, and the one who will definitely have made you cry, if you know the novel or the film.

Four sisters, four different personalities, all bound together in an incredible piece of storytelling.

Well, our Bible passage today is all about four different personalities, four characters all bound together not by family, but through an encounter with Jesus. I think it’s some incredible storytelling, and it’s the beginning of an even more amazing story that we’ll follow in weeks to come.

So why don’t we pray and ask God to open that story up for us this morning.

Our dear heavenly Father, as we read your word this morning, will you transport us into the story. Will you help us imagine an encounter with Jesus, and would you make that real for us today. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen

Well, we are in week 2 of our new sermon series called *Encounters with Jesus*. It’s all about people who met Jesus, and how they were changed by it. And today’s passage takes us right back to the very first moments of Jesus’ public ministry.

A super brief history of Jesus' life up to this point: Jesus is 30 years old, give or take, he's spent his life as a carpenter in a small town. This is kind of surprising given the hype around his miraculous birth, to a virgin mother, with the angels and the wise men. We don't know much about his childhood, except for the glimpse that Luke gives us of Jesus as a 12 year old, in the temple, asking questions of the rabbis, and leaving people amazed with his understanding. But apart from that, Jesus grows up largely under the radar.

Until the day before our passage here, when Jesus is baptized by John the Baptist, and the Holy Spirit descends on him like a dove, and God's voice speaks to him from heaven saying: This is my Son, whom I love. That is God's public announcement to Jesus that the time had come to reveal him as the Chosen One.

And so our passage opens with the **very** first encounter that anyone has with Jesus after his baptism. The first recorded encounter. And it happens to two disciples of John the Baptist. In those days, disciples would follow after a teacher, they would learn from him and emulate his lifestyle. Disciples were students, I guess you could say, students dedicated to a master's teaching.

The two characters we meet are disciples of John. They had been listening to John's teaching about the Chosen One, and they were waiting for the Chosen One to be revealed. Look at what happens when John points to Jesus: (v35)

³⁵ The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. ³⁶ When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God!" (John 1:35-36)

Lamb of God – that's like a codeword for the Chosen One. It's a reference to an Old Testament prophecy. The disciples know exactly what it means. So they turn their attention away from John, towards Jesus. (v37)

³⁷ When the two disciples heard him say this, they **followed** Jesus.

Remember we are thinking about encounters with Jesus. I want you to look at v37 quickly for me, because something absolutely remarkable happens in it. Do you see it?

These two disciples of John the Baptist, who had dedicated themselves to following John, all of a sudden turn to follow Jesus instead. Isn't that remarkable? Jesus hasn't said a word, but on the strength of their master's recommendation, they change the course of their life.

Maybe I'm overstating it, but they give Jesus a chance, based on the word of someone they trust. I wonder if your friends or family might be willing to give Jesus a chance, purely on the basis of a word from you?

I'm going to say more about that in a moment. Come back to v38 with me, because Jesus speaks the first words that we have recorded from his public ministry. Jesus turns around, and sees the two disciples following him, and he asks:

“What do you want?”

When I was a kid, I remember going to a stage play that was an adaptation of a popular children's book called *Hating Alison Ashley*. It's about the experience of a junior high girl who is overshadowed by the very beautiful and very clever Alison Ashley. Something embarrassing happens on school camp, and the main character had this line where she said: “I wish I could die.” Anyway the actor played with the line so that it emphasized different words: I **wish** I could die. I wish **I** could die. I wish I could **die**...

Jesus says this line to the disciples a bit like that: “What do you want?”

It's not dismissive, like: What do you want...

No, it's an invitation. It's this open ended question that invites you to consider what you really want.

What do you want? What are you seeking? What is it that you are looking for, in life?
What do you truly want?

These are the first words of Jesus. It's no surprise that John remembers them – we assume he was one of the two people at the heart of this story. John remembers what it was like when he first met Jesus, when Jesus looked him in the eye and asked what he was looking for.

What are **you** looking for? What brought you to church this morning? Or what prompted you to log on and watch online?

You see, Jesus is asking us the same question. What are you looking for, deep down? What are you hoping Jesus can bring to your life?

I've been a Christian for 30 years now, and this question hit me hard this week. What am I looking for in Jesus? If you're somebody who journals, this would be a great question to work through, to pray about, a great question to discuss in your Small Group, or at Alpha.

PAUSE

The disciples don't give us a deep answer. Instead they ask where Jesus is staying. That's part of following a travelling teacher, I guess.

But Jesus answers them with another invitation, another deliberately provocative message (v39)

They said, “Rabbi” (which means “Teacher”), “where are you staying?”
³⁹ “Come,” he replied, “and you will see.” (John 1:38-39)

Come, and you will see...

Is anybody else here a visual learner? I want to describe to you a game that I’ve started to play here in town. It’s called Pickleball. I’d never heard of pickleball before I moved to the States, and I have a feeling lots of you have never heard of it before either. Which is why I hope it works as an illustration.

If you don’t know what pickleball is, it’s kind of like playing tennis on a miniature tennis court, only you use a paddle that’s like a table tennis paddle but larger, and the ball is a plastic ball with holes in it, like a whiffle ball. Is your imagination running wild? Go home and google it, and you’ll see exactly what I’m talking about. Or come down to the courts on Oak Circle and see it in person. It’ll make perfect sense, and you might even be tempted to give it a try!

There is something about seeing it in person that makes all the difference. Jesus invites the new disciples to **come and see** where he is going, to come and see what he might do. Come and see and give Jesus a chance to show you what happens when you are following the Chosen One.

“Come, and you will see,” Jesus says to us, just like he said to the men in v39...

Andrew

Well I promised that we would see four encounters with Jesus, four different characters who all meet Jesus in different ways.

And one of them we’ve already met. Look at v40 with me.

⁴⁰ Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. (John 1:40)

Andrew is one of the two people from the encounter we just read in v37. One of the first two people who became followers of Jesus. It was Andrew and another disciple who were the first to spend a day with Jesus, and who knows what Jesus talked to them about. It’s not recorded here (although tradition has it that John, the writer of these words, was the other one present – he just doesn’t write himself into the story.)

But come back to Andrew. What a story he could have told. “I was the first to follow Jesus.” You can imagine the prowess in that, the prestige, the elevated status he might have claimed.

But look back at v40. How is Andrew introduced? He is *Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother*.

Is anybody else here the number two child in your family? I am. I have an older brother and two younger sisters. I feel like I spent my teenage years in my brother's shadow. "Yes, he is my brother. Yes, sir, I have a lot to live up to."

Andrew is remembered as Simon Peter's brother. The one whose brother became the most important apostle. In fact, I'm not sure that I could have told you a few days ago which disciple was Simon Peter's brother.

But we see in v41 the important role that Andrew had in the story of early church:

⁴¹The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ). ⁴²And he brought him to Jesus. (John 1:41-42)

Andrew is the reason that Peter became a Christian. Andrew's excitement to share the news with his brother had a major impact on the story of the church. Does Andrew demand to be in the spotlight? It doesn't seem so. He's rarely mentioned in the rest of John's gospel, but when he is mentioned, he is always bringing someone else to Jesus.¹

Sometimes in church it can seem like the upfront roles are the most important, the glamorous positions, the ones that get all the glory. But Andrew reminds us that there is something very admirable about quietly and faithfully inviting people to come and see Jesus.

I personally ended up a Christian because of a quiet and faithful friend who invited me to church, week after week for almost a year. He was not an up-front guy. You probably wouldn't have noticed him at a party because he was so unassuming. But because of his faithful inviting, my 12th grade Bible Study group had to split up and form two groups because James had invited so many young men to come and meet Jesus.

I'm praying for lots of Andrews at Yountville Community Church. Unassuming characters who are smitten by Jesus, and are excited to share him with everyone they meet...

Peter

The next encounter with Jesus is Andrew's brother, Simon Peter.

John assumes that we know who Simon Peter is, like he needs no introduction. And that's because Simon Peter ends up becoming the lead disciple, Jesus' closest friend and the one who ends up founding the church after Jesus returned to heaven. Peter is probably the most famous disciple of all, and this passage foreshadows his rise to that prominent position.

Read with me from v41:

¹ John 6:8-9, John 12:22

⁴¹The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, “We have found the Messiah” (that is, the Christ). ⁴²And he brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, “You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas” (which, when translated, is Peter).

Jesus looks at Andrew’s brother, and gives him a new name. A new identity. No longer will he be Simon, son of John, the fisherman. From now on he is to be Peter.

Does anybody know what the name Peter means in Greek? Petros means the Rock.

Jesus says in Matthew 16 that Peter will be the rock on which he builds his church. Peter is given this cornerstone role, this weighty responsibility. The fisherman who would become a fisher of men...

The name that Jesus gives Peter, it’s all about potential, isn’t it? Jesus sees Peter not as what he is, but as what he might become. And that’s a powerful lesson about the way Jesus sees us.

The great sculptor Michelangelo famously said:

Every block of stone has a statue inside it and it is the task of the sculptor to discover it.

Jesus sees the statue inside the block of stone. He sees what we can become, and he will chip away at us until we become the masterpiece that he intended, if we’ll let him.

I wonder if you were to meet Jesus today, like Simon met Jesus, I wonder **what name he might give you?** I wonder what potential he sees, that perhaps you don’t see yourself?

The bravery to be like Andrew, the inviter? Or a foundation stone, like Peter? What if Jesus were to call you and use you in the next stage of your life in a way that you couldn’t possibly have imagined? What might that even look like?

- Perhaps Jesus might call you from being a participant in Alpha, to a leader on our Alpha courses.
- Perhaps Jesus might take you from someone who has never prayed, to a person who joins a prayer team and prays for our church regularly.
- Perhaps you might have picked up the Bible for the first time in the last 6 months, but it has changed your life. Maybe Jesus is calling you to be a Bible teacher? Or more radical even – a pastor, or a missionary.

Does it sound ridiculous? If you’d asked me at 16 what I wanted to be when I grew up, I would have told you a lawyer. But Jesus has a way of chipping away at us to reveal the sculpture inside.

If you meet Jesus today, don’t be surprised when he calls you into a very different life than you expected. You see, following Jesus is all about receiving a new identity, a new mission in life, a

new calling. It's the greatest adventure ever, and it starts with listening to Jesus' call over your life.

Philip and Nathanael

The last two encounters with Jesus I just want to touch on briefly. It's the encounters that Philip and Nathanael have with Jesus.

Philip is one of the disciples that we hear the least about. In fact, this is probably his starring moment in the New Testament. Look at how Philip ends up as a disciple (v43):

⁴³ The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, "Follow me." (John 1:43)

Philip doesn't find Jesus. Jesus finds Philip. And Jesus says to him: "Follow me."

I wonder if some of you who are listening today are a bit like Philip. Perhaps you're not sure why you came to church today. Perhaps you're not sure about this whole Christianity thing. What do you think Jesus would say to you if he were here right now?

I think he would say what he said to Philip: "Follow me." No ifs, no buts, just follow me.

I love Philip, because he is everything I wasn't. He heard Jesus voice, and he followed. That simple.

I pray that some of you are having a Philip moment right now – that Jesus is speaking to your heart and you're deciding here and now to follow him. Perhaps that's you right now? Praise God, and hang on to that feeling. Don't let it go. We're going to say a prayer together in a moment.

There is one more character who encounters Jesus. Nathanael. We only read the first part of Nathanael's encounter with Jesus, which is when he scoffed at his friend Philip. (BTW how brave is Philip – Jesus calls Philip to follow him, and right away Philip goes and finds Nathanael to tell him about Jesus. Amazing!)

But look at what Nathanael says to Philip (v45)

⁴⁵ Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

⁴⁶ "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" Nathanael asked. (John 1:45-46)

Nathanael dismisses the whole idea of Jesus because he is from Nazareth. A cultural backwater. Can anything good come from there, he scoffs?

It's interesting telling people that I'm a pastor. I often get the Nathanael treatment. As if I must be completely naïve to believe in Jesus. Or that I can't be terribly intelligent, because everybody knows that Jesus isn't real. I've received some pretty contemptuous comments.

That's Nathanael's go-to attitude about Jesus – contempt. And we'll meet plenty of people with that same attitude to Jesus.

But I love Philip's response to Nathanael... It's there in v46:

“Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?” Nathanael asked.

“Come and see,” said Philip. (John 1:46)

Philip doesn't argue, he just invites Nathanael to see for himself. One of the things I love about Alpha is that it starts with the assumption that lots of people have doubts about Jesus. They are skeptical about who he is. And so Alpha encourages participants to share those attitudes. We don't shy away from them, we have the conversation. Because for many, when they come and see Jesus for themselves, those pre-formed attitudes often melt away as they come face to face with Jesus.

Which is what happened for Nathanael. We don't have time to go into the details, but Nathanael meets Jesus and Jesus speaks a word of truth into Nathanael's life that convinces him Jesus is the real deal. Then Jesus tells him you haven't seen anything yet...

You might be feeling a bit like Nathanael this morning. If that's you, can I encourage you to take a chance, to come and see, to come and meet Jesus and see if there might be more to him than you thought. Alpha might be the place to start. We'd love to see you there. Or maybe it's just committing to come to church over the next 8 weeks, as we look at these Encounters with Jesus.

Because we want everybody here to have their own encounter with Jesus. Is that something you're willing to do?

Let's pray.

