

## **“An Invitation” (John 1:29–51)(7.26.20)**

John 1:29–51 (ESV)

<sup>29</sup>The next day [John the Baptist] saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” <sup>30</sup>This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.’ <sup>31</sup>I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel.” <sup>32</sup>And John bore witness: “I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him.” <sup>33</sup>I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ <sup>34</sup>And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.” <sup>35</sup>The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples, <sup>36</sup>and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God!” <sup>37</sup>The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. <sup>38</sup>Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, “What are you seeking?” And they said to him, “Rabbi” (which means Teacher), “where are you staying?” <sup>39</sup>He said to them, “Come and you will see.” So they came and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour. <sup>40</sup>One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. <sup>41</sup>He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, “We have found the Messiah” (which means Christ). <sup>42</sup>He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, “You are Simon the son of John. You shall be called Cephas” (which means Peter). <sup>43</sup>The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Follow me.” <sup>44</sup>Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. <sup>45</sup>Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.” <sup>46</sup>Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “**Come and see.**” <sup>47</sup>Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!” <sup>48</sup>Nathanael said to him, “How do you know me?” Jesus answered him, “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.” <sup>49</sup>Nathanael answered him, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” <sup>50</sup>Jesus answered him, “Because I said to you, ‘I saw you under the fig tree,’ do you believe? You will see greater things than these.” <sup>51</sup>And he said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”

### **The word of God for the people of God.**

Title: **“An Invitation”**

LET US PRAY.

INTRODUCTION:

In this Gospel of John, the first words of Jesus that he shares is the question for every person, “What are you seeking?” There are profound theological and spiritual implications to this question; but more importantly, there are eternal implications to Jesus’ question, “What are you seeking?” Another translation has it as “What do you want?” And another has it, “What are you looking for?”

In these verses, Jesus is called: Lamb of God, Rabbi/Teacher, Messiah, Son of God, King of Israel, Son of Man; and, a staircase connecting heaven and earth. In the first 28 verses, which we did not read this morning, Jesus is called: the Word, God, Creator, life, light, AND the One for whom John the Baptist came to prepare the way. So, who is this Jesus? Let us answer his invitation to come and see. Let us follow him. Let us see where Jesus dwells and live with Him.

BODY:

The first church I served was Eldora United Methodist Church in Cape May County. It was more like a chapel and there were 13 members. When Carol and I went down there with the District Superintendent to meet with the Pastor Parish Relations Committee. All the members were present.

Eldora is a rural farming community with a very low population density. In several areas like theirs, there were United Methodist Churches about every three miles. The church was close to a fork in the road. To

the left was the main highway and to the right was the quiet narrow country road that went by the front of the church.

Like here, there was a cemetery alongside of the church. From the main highway, you could see across a small patch of field to the cemetery and then to the back of the church building. In the second summer that I was there, I had a banner made.

The banner read, "Come and See;" and, gave the Sunday morning worship time. It was a large banner. I borrowed a ladder and strung it with wire from one side of the bottom of the roof line to the other side. It covered the whole back – it had red lettering – and it was high. You couldn't miss seeing it from the highway. But no one came to see.

We bought some of the standard United Methodist Church road signs. I put one on the highway going south. The other, I put on the highway going north, right at the fork in the road. But no one turned off the broad way onto the narrow way. They did not come to see.

It has been ten years now since my appointment changed and I left Eldora. If we look at our culture today, it has changed rapidly in those ten years – and not for the better. My stay at my next church was very short indeed. The culture had infiltrated the church and when I dared to address the issue, the District Superintendent sided with the culture and not with biblical guidance.

Paul spoke about a time like ours in his letter to his spiritual son Timothy: 2 Timothy 4:1–5 (ESV) **4** I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: <sup>2</sup> preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. <sup>3</sup> For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, <sup>4</sup> and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. <sup>5</sup> As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

The Jews had waited for centuries for the Messiah. Most of the Bible consists of the Old Testament history of God's Chosen People. They demonstrated over and over again that their faithfulness to the LORD their God rarely ever lasted more than one generation. They broke God's heart over and over again. He would send disaster, His wrath, upon them to turn them back. Eventually, they would repent and be restored; but, then the cycle would begin again.

They proved the fallenness of the human condition, the darkness of the human heart. We are no different today. We too need the Messiah, the Christ. All this is no surprise to our heavenly Father. In today's scripture, the Apostle John records John the Baptist's declaration, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" In The Book of Revelation, the Apostle John was inspired to write, Revelation 13:8 (NIV84) All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast—all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world. No, the LORD was not surprised. Jesus, His only begotten Son, was the plan from the beginning. So, my purpose today is not to discourage you about the human condition. My purpose is encourage you with the Lord's divine intervention.

As Jesus invited Andrew, so Andrew invited his brother Simon Peter. As Jesus invited Philip, so Philip invited Nathanael. As Jesus invites each and every one of us to Come and See, so too we are to invite others to Come and See Jesus. Throughout His ministry, He issued many invitations to Come to Jesus. Matthew 4:19 (ESV) And [Jesus] said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." Jesus invited his disciples to a new life. This life would have a new purpose. It is an outwardly focused life that brings others into the kingdom of God.

Matthew 11:28–30 (ESV) Jesus beckoned,  
<sup>28</sup> "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup> For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

While coming to Jesus secures our eternal life, it is not just about our heavenly reward. This life of following Jesus, a life that abides in Jesus, is for the here and now. Are any of you laboring and feeling burdened? Do you know anyone who labors and is heavy laden? Issue the invitation to share Jesus' yoke. Yes, yoke yourself to Jesus – surely a blessing in our current day.

Most people know that Jesus was able to walk on water. On a dark and stormy night, on the Galilean Sea, the disciples' boat was being buffeted by the wind and waves. They were terrified when they saw a ghostly resemblance approaching them. Peter calls out, Matthew 14:28–29 (NIV84) <sup>28</sup>“Lord, if it's you, tell me to come to you on the water.”

<sup>29</sup>“Come,” [Jesus] said.

Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus.

Jesus' invitation here is into a walk of faith. Though the storms of life assail you, step out of the boat. Do not be afraid. Do not be constrained by conventional human understanding. Instead trust the Lord, your Lord. Do not look at the wind. Do not look at the waves. Look unto Jesus and come.

Only trust him, only trust him,  
only trust him now.

He will save you, he will save you,  
he will save you now.

What does this faith walk look like? The elements may be against you. You will face spiritual darkness. But in that darkness is the hand of Jesus to reach out and catch us.

Jesus' invitation to come will likely require sacrifice. Matthew 16:24 (ESV) Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” The old self must be put away. The new self is then able to carry the cross designed specifically for each one of us. It is part of our God given purpose. Through the gifting of the Holy Spirit, each one of us is equipped for the edifying, the building up of the Body of Christ – which we call the church.

Fathers and mothers were bringing their children to be touched by Jesus and the disciples sought to protect Jesus from the crowds; Matthew 19:14 (ESV) but Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven.” Here we must recognize the criticality of extending the Jesus invitation to children.

The facts speak for themselves. Today in America, according to Barna Research, 94% of Christians committed to Jesus at 18 years of age or under. If a person reaches adulthood without coming to Christ, the chances are small that they will ever positively respond to Jesus' invitation to come.

Significant changes can happen in one generation. If we do not win the souls of our children for Christ, then we are abandoning them to Satan and this wayward world. Parents and grandparents, if you are not fighting for the youth, you are surrendering them to the Enemy. Jesus yearns for the little children to come to Him. May he take them in His arms and upon his lap.

In another instance, a rich young man comes to Jesus and asks, “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus gives the man the commandments and the rich young man says he has always kept them. Mark 10:21 (ESV) And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, “You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” Unfortunately, the rich young man could not let go of that one thing and receive Jesus' invitation. Is there one thing keeping you from Jesus? Maybe you are trying to reach someone you care about for Jesus, but they are not responding. They may be holding onto one thing that prevents them from coming to Jesus. Help them identify any obstacle that hinders their heavenly treasure.

Jesus offers the invitation to the most unlikely too. Zacchaeus was a wee little man who needed to climb a tree in order to see over the crowd and gain a glimpse of Jesus. Luke 19:5 (ESV) And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today.”

Zacchaeus was generally hated because he was a tax collector. It was a position that the greedy would vie for because through it they gained power and wealth. They used the force of Roman soldiers to exhort the taxes for Rome and they kept a nice profit. Zacchaeus received Jesus' invitation and then gave half his money to the poor. And, he pledged to make amends to those he had cheated by repaying four-fold the amount.

In our Gospel of John 6:35 (ESV) Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst." What is this invitation? Jesus had miraculously fed the five thousand with five small barley loaves and two fishes. When the crowds came to Jesus again, he recognized that their motivations were wrong. They were responding to having their bellies filled.

People today are often sold a bill of goods about Jesus. It is some form of the prosperity gospel. They are told to Come to Jesus, not for what you can do for the kingdom but for what Jesus can do for you. I saw a commercial for preacher Joseph Prince, who has a megachurch in Singapore. He was definitely "selling the gospel" for a profit.

Jesus is protesting against this mindset by proclaiming the kingdom of God. John 6:27 (NIV84) "Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval."

In the next chapter of John 7:37–39 (NIV84)

<sup>37</sup> On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. <sup>38</sup> Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him." <sup>39</sup> By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.

This invitation from Jesus promises the great gift of the Holy Spirit. The Counselor and Comforter will guide us into all truth. Yes, we must be born from above. We must be born again; born of water and the Spirit. This is Jesus' invitation to be new creations in Christ. Do you have such a thirst? I look around and see millions dying of spiritual thirst and they cannot be satisfied by any Gatorade or PowerAde. Only accepting Jesus' invitation to come will complete and fill them.

Finally, one last and most vivid invitation from Jesus. John 11:43 (ESV) When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out." You might argue that this is a command and not an invitation. And I would respond, maybe they have all been commands.

Jesus is calling his good friend Lazarus out of the tomb. For four days, Lazarus lay in that dark grave until his body began to decompose. He was constrained by the grave clothes wrapping his lifeless body.

When Jesus ordered the stone rolled away, practical Martha warned, "But Lord, there will be a stink."

That is the situation of the whole human race. Ephesians 2:1–2 (NIV84) **2** As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, <sup>2</sup> in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.

Jesus calls you, calls me, calls everyone, "Come out." Come out of the darkness. Come out of the stink. Come out of the grave. Come into the world of the living and into the light. Come to Jesus. Come and see.

Ephesians 2:3–5 (NIV84)

<sup>3</sup> All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. **<sup>4</sup> But because of his great love for us,** God, who is rich in mercy, **<sup>5</sup> made us alive with Christ** even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.

A few years ago, the state of New Jersey added new on and off ramps at exit 44 of the Garden State Parkway. For many of us it has been a small blessing and in a minor way has improved our quality of life

by convenience and time savings. There are many other places that could benefit by added access to the Garden State Parkway.

What Jesus revealed to Nathanael is a blessing beyond comparison. Heaven has been OPENED. Jesus has given us access to heaven, access to the Father. The Voice paraphrases it like this: "I tell you the truth: before our journey is complete, you will see the heavens standing open while heavenly messengers ascend and descend, swirling around the Son of Man." Will you journey with Jesus too? Are you ready to see God working in this weary and worried world?

CONCLUSION:

Today, I preach Jesus to you. I have nothing else to offer. Will you accept Jesus' invitation to Come and See? Will you share Jesus' invitation to Come and See?

Ms. Matilda Hull wrote "The Peace Cry:"

IN grace God has sent us  
A message of Peace,  
From the kingdom of Satan  
To give us release;  
And its claim for acceptance,  
Not daring to doubt,  
We disclaim other efforts  
To bring it about  
No "brass band" or "War Cry"  
Will add to its force;  
No "Councils of War"  
Give success to its course.

**But the preaching of Jesus (x3)**

Develops God's might,  
In translating lost sinners  
From darkness to light.

Come and see for yourself. Come and see. Come and see.

Amen and amen. Let us pray.