

Be Amazed Come and See

January 4th 2025, Luke Bushman, a Reflection on John 1:35-51

Introduction

Our sermon theme this morning is “Be Amazed: Come and See”. I love the inclusion of this passage in the advent material about being amazed. Compared to a fiery furnace rescue, and dry bones becoming humans, going to the place Jesus is dwelling, does not seem particularly amazing. It sounds more like a home tour, or a dinner party than a miracle. That is the thing about Jesus. Simply dwelling with Jesus, or seeing Jesus can be transformative, and amazing. Jesus loves us, and invites us in a way that changes lives.

The Text

John’s gospel includes these two consecutive stories of Jesus calling his earliest disciples. These calling narratives pop up in the other gospels, but each author seems to have a unique focus and flavour as they recount Jesus meeting those first disciples. A point of interest in this telling, is the role of John the Baptist. I apologize if it gets confusing, but I have tried to designate the two as “John the Baptist” and “John the Author”.

A. The Role of John the Baptist

In each of the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) Jesus is baptized by John the Baptist. In Matthew and Luke, John the Baptist makes a later appearance in the narrative, sending some disciples to ask Jesus a question about his ministry. Mark and Matthew recount the beheading of John the Baptist. Luke’s gospel even foretells the birth of John the Baptist, with an additional prophecy about him, and an anecdote about his mother being pregnant with him. John the Baptist plays a much smaller part in John’s gospel.

There is no discussion of him before his birth. He doesn’t explicitly baptize Jesus. His death is not mentioned. There are still the same similarities, it is obvious all the gospels are talking about the same person.

After his testimony, John simply disappears from the scene. He is accorded no formal exit... John has performed his function in the

story, and, therefore, the story is finished with him. This will be true also at 3:24; John disappears from the Gospel narrative with no mention of his death. He has led others to Jesus, and his witness will now be replaced by his disciples' own experience of Jesus. (O' Day)

In omitting the other the other details about John the Baptist, this text seems to put the focus on John's mission. John's role is to lead others to Christ. I love how John the Baptist doesn't become territorial about his followers moving onto following Jesus. That was his purpose and his goal. He puts it really well in 3:30, "He must increase, but I must decrease". I think that John's humility stands out in a world where people want to amass a following. John sees it is not a competition to gain followers. His worth is not determined by the amount of converts he has. John the Author limits the air time of John the Baptist to really hit home the point- John's job is to prepare the way for Jesus. What might our world look like, if we surrendered our prominence to bring Christ's message into the world? Why is doing so sometimes difficult for us?

B. *Where are you staying?*

John the Author's iteration of the gospel often stands out as unique. John often seems more focused on theology, wordplay, and poetry than the author gospel authors, who you might say focus on historicity and tradition. John is a creative soul it seems. As Jesus calls his first disciples, John once tells the story differently than the authors. In the second calling narrative we read this morning, Jesus says his classic phrase "Come and follow me". In the first calling narrative, two disciples hear John's proclamation, and start to follow Jesus, before he has told them to do anything. Jesus' first words to them are a question "What are you looking for?"

There is so much meaning and beauty in this question. It speaks to a part of who we are as humans. Jesus recognizes that we are all looking for something. That looking for something has likely brought you to where you are sitting today. What were you looking for when you embarked on this journey of faith? Were you looking for community? For answers? For comfort? For support? For a place to simply exist and be? Jesus sees these two disciples, and he knows they are following him, because they are looking for something. Maybe the simplest way to put it is that they are looking for something *more*.

Jesus' new disciples, want to know where he is staying. John begins using some wordplay here. In John's gospel, he often gives words a spiritual meaning, in addition to how the word affects the story. When they ask where are you staying, that question makes sense within the story arc. It also has a deeper meaning in John's narrative.

I dodged taking Greek in college because the class was at 7 am and I am not a morning person, so I am going to do my best here. John uses the word *menō* and in our Bibles it translates as "stay, dwell, abide, remain" (Swartley, 78). When we read this in the context of the story it is about where Jesus is living. When we hear "where are you staying" we think, where are you living right now. But in John's gospel, this has spiritual meaning as well, and he intentionally uses this word throughout the book to communicate a concept. The author John has already used it to describe the spirit descending on Jesus at his baptism. He later uses it John 15, in Jesus' sermon about the vine and the branches (O' Day). Here are three examples, with the appearance of "meno" being highlighted.

Meno- stay, abide, remain.

John 1:32-33 And John testified, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it **remained** on him. I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and **remain** is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.'

John 1:38-39 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**?" 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.

John 15:4-5 **Abide** in me as I **abide** in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it **abides** in the vine, neither can you unless you **abide** in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who **abide** in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.

Scholars like Willard M Swartley, believe that John is intentionally using this word in multiple contexts for a purpose. John is using this repeated word to communicate a beautiful truth. That spending the day with Jesus, is similar to his command to abide in him to bear fruit, and change the world. Remaining with Jesus for the afternoon, is comparable to the

way that the Holy Spirit remains on Jesus. There is something, spiritual, and life changing about being together. When his new disciples spend the day with him they are not just in physical proximity to Jesus, they are beginning to abide in Jesus, beginning to be transformed by him.

C. You will see greater things than these

The second calling narrative that we read this morning has a lot more similarities with the other three gospels. Jesus comes across Phillip and says "Follow me". Phillip is thrilled, so thrilled that he finds Nathanael and tells him they have found the one who was prophesied about. The early Jesus movement spreads via word-of-mouth. Andrew brings his brother Peter, and Philip brings Nathanael. When Nathanael meets Jesus, he is amazed that he seems to have a special site. Jesus makes an interesting promise. You will see greater things than these. In Nathanael's amazement, Jesus says "You think that is awesome, wait until you see everything else". Jesus is not wrong, the disciples witness some incredible, remarkable things as they walk alongside Jesus. Those who follow Jesus can expect to be amazed, because they will see great things.

These are a few things that stood out to me in the text this morning, but there is so much more that we could look at. There are so many interesting places that scripture can take us. It can make us ask so many questions, and there are so many fun facts and points of connection on the surface, and under it. Since we can't talk about the first chapter of John forever, what are some things we can take from the text into our lives?

Application

A. Called to be Servants not Saviors

John the Author, tells John the Baptist's story in a different way. Using scarcity rather than explanation, it is clear that John's role is to point others to Christ. I think we can learn a lot from John the Baptist. His worth and value is not tied up in the amount of followers he has or converts he makes. Lives changed is not something that can be measured, nor is it a metric of success. In my experience this unfortunately contrasts the Christian world. We often, myself included, want to be the saviour in a situation. We want people to like our church the best. I want to be perfect, and help everyone, and feel needed. It can be easy to get discouraged or prideful, when we try and measure our

impact in the world. None of that matters. What matters is that people find the peace, love and justice of Jesus. John understood that it wasn't about him, but about lives being changed, and people finding Jesus. John understood it was not about him, but about Jesus. John the Baptist was a servant of Christ. His job was to do his best, in his situation, and reflect Christ. His job wasn't to be the savior of the world. He did not have to carry the weight of that task. He did not inflate his ego by thinking it was all about him. How can we point others to the goodness of Jesus?

B. Henri Nouwen Come and See Reflection

In many facets of our lives, it feels like we are in a constant battle to measure up. There is a long list of goals to accomplish, weaknesses to overcome, and positive actions to do. When I read about the radical and transformative life of Jesus, I am often left with insecurity mixed with the inspiration. Am I falling short? Am I good enough? Am I doing enough? To add in this idea of discipleship can feel like adding another list of demands in an already demanding world.

Henri Nouwen has a book I enjoy. It is called "Following Jesus: Finding Our Way Home in an Age of Anxiety". During my hiring process to OMC I was asked to write about some books that have impacted me, and this was one of the books I wrote about. He opens this book by discussing the calling of the first disciples in John's gospel, the same passage we are looking at this morning. His perspective, really leans into the simplicity of the invitation that Jesus gives to those first disciples. Here is a small excerpt, and maybe from it you can see why I liked this book so much.

Somehow, right here in the beginning of the story we hear a very important question: Where do you live? What is your place? What is your way? How is it to be around you?

Jesus says, "Come and see."

He doesn't say, "come into my world." He doesn't say, "Come, I will change you." He doesn't say "Become my disciples," "Listen to me," "Do what I tell you," "take up your cross." No. He says, "come and see. Look around. Get to know me." That is the invitation.

Nouwen, 19.

John the author makes it clear that there is something spiritual, life changing, and magical about being with Jesus. When his first disciples come and see, they are not just following him around, looking at his house, like an Architectural Digest home tour. They are experiencing what it is like to abide in Jesus. They remain together, and are stuck together, the way that the Holy Spirit is stuck on Jesus. This makes me think of two things.

First, our faith journey starts with simply abiding in Jesus. While we unfortunately cannot go to his home at this point, what are the ways that we draw near to Jesus, and just exist. We are invited to just come and see what this Jesus thing is about. What are some ways that we can pause, and just be with Jesus in our context?

Second, there is clearly something sacred, and powerful about being together. Over the Christmas break, I had the chance to have two of my old friends over for the day. I have seen them both from time to time, but the three of us hadn't really been in a room altogether in a long time. We ended up doing what we used to do. We sat, and half watched movies on the VCR, but mainly visited and laughed and joked around. We chose to watch the Godfather and the Godfather Pt. II, and we constantly had to google what was happening in the movie because we kept getting confused from visiting too much. It felt so surreal, almost like time travelling back into our fondest memories as a trio. I hope we as people of faith never forget the sacredness of being together. I hope you all got to experience being together with others over the holiday season.

C. What are the greater things that you have seen?

Finally, we are reminded by this text, that in following Jesus, we are signing up to see truly great things. It can be easy in the chaos of our lives to forget about the amazing places our faith journey has taken us. I have the privilege of taking time to reflect on what Jesus has done as part of my work. I also know that when I was working as a plumber, it was really hard

to make time to think about the great things I have seen in this faith journey.

A lot of what we have talked about for applying this has been questions. I would encourage you to ask or think about the following questions. Whether that is in the coffee room after church with other folks, at your family dinner table, or on your own in a journal. Consider these prompts as you go from here:

How do we point others towards Jesus? How do we avoid make ourselves the saviour?

What are some ways that you can pause and just BE WITH Jesus?

What are the great things you have seen on your faith journey?

Let us go from this place, knowing our job is like John's- to simply reflect Jesus in whatever ways we can. Knowing that to spend time together is sacred. Feeling comfort that Jesus' invitation is simply to abide in him- to see where he is staying. And feeling hopeful, that we will see greater things on this faith journey.

Works Cited

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Swartley, Willard, M. *John: Believers Church Bible Commentary*. Herald Press, 2013

Nouwen, Henri J.M. *Following Jesus: Finding Our Way Home in an Age of Anxiety*. Convergent Books, 2019