

**GRACE FOR THE JOURNEY—COME & SEE**  
**John 1:29-42**

**Grace For The Journey Message Series**  
**July 26, 2015**  
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One of the great joys in my life was being able to take care of my two grandchildren, Soren & Elise, every Monday for eight years until both of them were in school—they are now eleven and eight. I will never forget their growth and development from infancy to school age—especially the discovery age when they would take my hand and say, “Grandpa, come and look!”

In the Gospel reading for today from John, Chapter 1, John the Baptist is one who called the people to come and see; to come and see Jesus the Son of God. John proclaimed, *“Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”*

John also bore witness to how at Jesus’ baptism he had seen the Holy Spirit descend on Jesus like a dove. He also told how it had been revealed to him by God himself that Jesus was God’s promised one; that Jesus would now baptize people with water and the Holy Spirit.

John called the people to come and see for themselves. Then when two of John’s disciples came to Jesus and asked him where he was staying Jesus himself told them to come and see. When they in turn had been with Jesus; when they had seen him face to face they too went to tell others to come and see—come see the Messiah which means Christ.

Therefore just as John the Baptist pointed to Jesus; just as he called people to come and see him, in the same way he is calling you and me to also come and see. He is calling us to acknowledge Jesus as our Savior and Lord; to put our faith and trust in him.

Then as we see him; as we experience firsthand his amazing grace, love and joy in us; we then will also want to share with others and proclaim to the world, “Come and see.” Come and see Jesus who takes away our sins; who brings forgiveness and healing to our hearts. Come and see Jesus who is the Savior; who is our only hope for this troubled world.

It is unfortunate however in our present day to realize that this idea of witnessing to others, of telling others about Jesus, is often thought of in negative terms. People often seem to think that witnessing and evangelism are about somehow beating people over the head with Bible verses; arguing about controversial issues; trying to somehow coerce someone into being a Christian.

Yet it is not that kind of witnessing that Jesus calls us to do. Only God can change lives—not us. It is not our job to try and argue with and try to convince others that we are right and they are wrong. Rather, as witnesses for Jesus, we are to simply invite people to come and see.

To come and see the witness of your own life and the transformation Jesus is making in you. To come and see the community of believers we are part of at Messiah—so they can see firsthand how much we love Jesus and how beautifully we love each other. To come and experience the joy we have in worship; in growing in our faith; in serving the needs of others.

Throughout my years of being a pastor one of my goals in each church I have served is to try to help them become truly welcoming and inviting churches. Needless to say, in order to do that we who are part of the church need to be willing to reach out and invite others to come and see.

Studies have found time and again that the most effective invitation to come and learn about Jesus; to come be part of his church is always one that is given personally by us to someone else—the invitation that we give to a neighbor, friend, co-worker, acquaintance. In fact these studies have found that over 75% of new people who come to a church, when asked why they came, share that it is because someone they know reached out and personally invited them.

There have been many articles and books written these past year years which talk about how our mainline Protestant and Roman Catholic churches are losing members in droves; how we are not doing a very good job of reaching those in that 18-35 year old age range. One of the reasons for this, of course, is because most churches are very weak in reaching out beyond themselves.

For example our Lutheran Church has been notorious for thinking that those moving into our area—especially if they have Norwegian, Swedish, German Lutheran roots—will automatically join our church. If we just put a sign on the corner; put an ad in the newspaper that is enough and will bring people in. Yet that is no longer happening.

The churches that are growing and alive today are the ones that have church members who are making a conscious effort to reach out and personally invite their neighbors and friends to come and see. It is a powerful witness to tell another person how our own life has been blessed; how we have been transformed by Christ; how we want them to come and see Jesus in our church.

It is troubling in these times of divisions in individual churches and denominations of every background how easily certain people and groups define themselves by what they are against. I am against this church decision; I'm against those who may have broken away; I am against those who I think are sinners; I am against those who don't see the Bible and things my way; I'm against those who I see as a threat to my Christianity and my Christian freedom.

Yet it is important to note that there is absolutely no positive witness for Jesus in simply being against something. Jesus rather calls us to invite people to come and see. Come and see how we love others as he has loved us—even our enemies and those we disagree with.

Come and you will see how Jesus has forgiven me; how that has made me more caring of others. Come and see lives being changed and filled with hope in our church. Come and see how we believe God is still Lord and in control—and how that fills us with hope and joy each day.

Jesus said, *“You will know them by their fruits.”* In order to be positive witnesses for Jesus we are to shine the light and hope of Jesus in such a compelling way that people want to come and see. Again it is not about what we are against, rather what we are for; how we are moving ahead in love; how the grace, understanding and forgiveness of Jesus is reflected in us.

Therefore to be better “inviters” we especially need our congregation to be inviting and welcoming. An example: if an individual makes an effort to reach out and invite someone to church; what affect will it have on that person if the members of the church are cold and uninviting; if the worship is painful and dull; if the building is a mess; if no one seems willing to welcome, give directions and help to those who are new?

It is so easy for each one of us to get stuck in our Sunday morning routines. We make a beeline to speak to our friends and relatives. We keep our eyes straight ahead in worship trying to avoid a new person sitting next to us. We forget to smile and be happy; we don't reflect the fact that we truly love coming to church and being part of this wonderful and caring fellowship.

My oldest brother is a semi-retired Lutheran pastor who has been a hired consultant to several congregations and their senior pastors. It is interesting that in a large suburban congregation, shortly after he starting working with them, my brother and his wife decided to worship there one Sunday. Yet no one at all greeted them; no one offered to show them around—no one.

Being welcoming and inviting also means that we make sure our worship experience; our worship order of service is welcoming and inviting. How easy is it for a new person to follow along and actually worship? Are they mostly floundering in hymnbooks and paper?

One way Messiah is attempting to be a welcoming church is through having the entire service, including readings and songs, projected on these large screens. Also, using a very simple format without confusing liturgies—it is our hope that any person from any background will feel comfortable worshipping here; even those who may have never been to a church before.

To be an inviting and welcoming church it is essential that the worship be inviting and welcoming—and this also includes the sermons/messages. This truth is definitely something I think about and try to be conscious of each week. Sermons/messages today need to be relevant; they need to speak to people's hurts and needs; they need to give some new insights and learning opportunities; they need to help people know that Jesus loves them and walks with them.

It is true that if you are making the effort to invite someone to worship you will want to feel confident that the message will not embarrass you. An inviting church works hard on messages; provides pastor's time for preparation; often uses series on relevant Biblical themes; tries to give people practical helps that they can carry with them in their daily walk in faith.

John the Baptist told the people to "*come and you will see...we have found the Messiah (that is, the Christ).*" This coming month of August we at Messiah will be participating in a celebration and will be inviting people to "Join The Celebration."

Each Sunday in August and September the messages and worship will focus on celebrating God's wonder, grace, forgiveness and new life—and will culminate in Messiah's "Join The Celebration" dance and supper at the Hoffman Center on Sat., Sept. 12, 5:30 P.M.

This is also the night before Rally Sunday and will be a great opportunity to invite those who are seeking for a positive place for their kids to learn about Jesus; as well as those seeking a positive and nurturing Christ-entered church—to invite and welcome them to Messiah.

Something very important to remember about this: You may feel it is difficult and uncomfortable to invite people to church—but not to a party and a celebration; everyone loves a celebration! Let us all join this celebration as we prepare for a new program year at Messiah.

Let us be like John the Baptist and invite friends and neighbors to come and see how lives at Messiah are being transformed and are being filled with hope in Jesus. Let us joyfully tell others like the disciples did: "*I have seen and testify that this is God's Chosen one!*" We have found and are getting to know better Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Come and see!