

John 1:35-51

³⁵The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, ³⁶and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, “Look, here is the Lamb of God!”

³⁷The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. ³⁸When 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?” ³⁹He 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. ⁴⁰One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. ⁴¹He first found his brother Simon and said to him, “We have found the Messiah” (which is translated Anointed). ⁴²He 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).

⁴³The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Follow me.”

⁴⁴Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. ⁴⁵Philip 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.” ⁴⁶Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “**Come and see.**” ⁴⁷When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, “Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!” ⁴⁸Nathanael asked him, “Where did you get to know me?” Jesus answered, “I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.” ⁴⁹Nathanael replied, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” ⁵⁰Jesus answered, “Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these.” ⁵¹And he said to him, “Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.”

“What If we Stopped Trying So Hard?”

How many of you know how to swim? Do you love to swim? How many of you don’t know how to swim? Okay, since you don’t know *how* to swim it makes no sense to ask you if you *like* to swim; the appropriate question is *are you afraid of getting into a pool or the ocean or a lake?* Of course you are, because you could die in that pool or ocean or lake. Now I love to swim – when I’m scheduling vacations I look for facilities with swimming pools. I love body surfing on the Jersey Shore, and I feel a little sorry for folks who don’t like to swim because I think they’re missing a lot of fun. I have to say that I’m fortunate that I had some good swimming instructors in my parents; they both knew how to swim and did so with great ease. They knew how to coast smoothly and calmly through the water. Simply put, they *modeled* good swimming for me. I suppose if they had both been poor swimmers or non-swimmers, if I had witnessed either of them flailing around in a lake desperately trying to keep their head above water, I doubt I would have a great love of swimming today. They would have been poor models for me to follow. Having good instructors, people who not only swim with ease but also enjoy the activity, inspired me to learn to swim and gain a lot of pleasure in that activity.

And I never took many swimming lessons; I just learned it I guess. I saw people who loved to swim, who had fun swimming, and in order to be with them, I had to learn to swim, so I did. The people who inspired me were not only good swimmers; they enjoyed swimming

And what applies to swimming applies to other activities as well; seeing good models inspires us to learn, and the joy of doing something makes the learning process almost unconscious. If we see people who are good at what they do and enjoy what they do, we are inspired to do the same. Good teachers who enjoy their vocation inspire their students to become teachers. Good musicians who enjoy playing inspire their audience to become good musicians who in turn enjoy playing. Furthermore when we see a great teacher teaching or a great musician playing or a great swimmer swimming we want to share that experience with others. You have a great college professor you tell your underclassmen to take her classes; when you hear a great musician you get others to come and see that musician play a concert. And when you want a child to learn to love to swim you show them great swimming. We don't tell our friends to take courses taught by a professor who clearly doesn't enjoy teaching and doesn't do a good job of it. We don't invite our friends to a concert given by a lousy musician who doesn't enjoy playing, and we don't inspire anyone to become a good swimmer and to enjoy the activity by exposing them to some guy flailing around desperately in the water.

The same principle applies to our lives as Christians; seeing a Christian who clearly has that great joy down in her heart and lives out her calling as a Christian will inspire you to become a joyful, faithful Christian, but seeing a Christian who finds her responsibilities to be drudgery and carries out her tasks without joy will certainly not inspire anyone to be a good Christian. And unfortunately there are a lot of uninspired, uninspiring Christians in the world.

What's even more unfortunate is that many unhappy, uninspired Christians feel obligated to be in mission; they take to heart Christ's commandment that they "go and make disciples of all nations." That's like being told to jump in the pool when you don't like to swim, and the only thing you know how to do is dogpaddle. And those who watch you see someone who is clearly not having a good time, flailing around in the water yelling, "Believe in Jesus Christ!" They're hardly inspiring. In fact they may end up discouraging anyone from getting in the water. Some of the best swimmers in the world are lifeguards, and in lifeguard training you learn that, when a person is in deep water and struggling to swim flailing around like a lunatic, you sometimes have to knock that person unconscious in order to get both of you safely to shore. There are a few Christians who need to be knocked unconscious and brought to the shore, because they have no business being in deep water, and they don't even want to be there.

I think we need to take our cue from today's Gospel reading. We need to begin by modeling Jesus. Two disciples follow Jesus and ask where he is staying, to which Jesus responds, "Come and see." It didn't take them long to be convinced that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah, and even as they continue to follow Jesus they reach out to others and say, "come and see," see this expert swimmer, this great musician this inspired teacher. And they continue to learn from him and they continue to invite others to "come and see" Jesus. They're not going around saying, "Boy this discipleship gig really sucks. Are you sure you want to see Jesus?"

You know, a good swimmer knows how to stay afloat indefinitely, for hours at a time. The trick is to let your lungs act as floatation devices; take a deep breath, and hold most of that air in your lungs. Breathe out a little and breathe in a little, but you keep your lungs filled and keep your face to the sky, or keep your eyes toward heaven. The air in your lungs will actually lift your chest up the surface, and if you simply breathe in and breathe out slightly, taking short breaths, you can stay afloat for hours and hours and apply very little energy. This is good to know in case you ever fall off a cruise ship.

The trick to staying afloat for a long time is not to paddle so hard to keep your head above water, but to relax, to NOT WORK so hard at it. Indeed if you talk to people who excel at anything, many will say that they got to be an expert simply because they enjoyed what they were doing, and they weren't even conscious of working. Work is a four-letter word. They simply did what they enjoyed doing, and because they enjoyed it they became good at it. Our Christian vocation should be the same way; Jesus did what he enjoyed doing – the will of the Father, which was to love and teach love to others. That inspired others to love and teach love to others – those inspired individuals are called disciples, and they do what they do well and without much conscious effort because they enjoy what they're doing. No one is inspired by a joyless disciple.

So the take home is to be happy, or else! No, just kidding. The take home is to come and see Jesus, be it in scripture or in prayer or in the church, and to keep coming and seeing until you really want others to come and see. The goal is not to add to our numbers; the goal grows into a disciple, and the way to do that is to simply be in awe at his presence, to be so moved by Jesus and so inspired to follow him that you're not even conscious of making an effort, that instead of trying you're just doing. And when you are inspired by Christ you will just *want* to invite others to meet him as well. Let's take our cue from Andrew and John and Philip. All that they did was invite people to come and see Jesus, and let *his* presence inspire those who came.