

COME AND SEE

Sermon, January 15, 2012

Texts: I Samuel 3:1-10; John 1:35-51; I Corinthians 6:12-20

Pam and Bob were serving as missionaries to the Philippines. Pam contracted amoebic dysentery, an intestinal infection caused by a parasite found in contaminated water or food. She was so badly infected that she went into a coma; fortunately, after treatment with strong antibiotics, she was able to recover. Unfortunately, it was belatedly discovered that she was expecting. Doctors urged her to end the pregnancy, telling her the medicines had more than likely caused irreversible damage to her baby and that her life might be put at risk, as well, if she were to carry the baby to term in her weakened condition. Citing her faith as the reason, she refused to end the pregnancy; in the spirit of Paul's words from the lectionary epistle reading this morning, she believed her body was not her own, it belonged to the God Who would have us protect life. Pam nearly lost their baby four times during the pregnancy. She recalled making a pledge to God with her husband: "If you will give us a son, we'll name him Timothy (*after Paul's young protégé in the New Testament*) and we'll make him a preacher." Pam spent the last two months of her pregnancy on bed rest, and on her due date — Aug. 14, 1987 — she gave birth to a perfectly healthy baby boy, who she described as "skinny, but rather long." Her son did grow up to become a preacher, of sorts. He preaches in prisons, makes hospital visits, and still serves from time to time with his father's ministry in the Philippines which now employs fifty people and includes an orphanage.

He also plays football. His name is Tim Tebow. (*The background of this story was printed in the newspaper Gainesville Sun: <http://www.gainesville.com/article/20071206/NEWS/712060310/0/entertain>. Also, see www.btea.org*)

Tim Tebow was the first sophomore in history to win college football's highest award, the Heisman Trophy. His current role as quarterback of the Denver Broncos has provided an incredible platform for Christian witness. He is being called The Mile-High Messiah (*after Denver's Mile High Stadium where the Broncos play their home games*), as he constantly directs attention to the God he so faithfully serves. This week an ESPN poll recently pegged him as America's most admired athlete. Last night ended one of the season's most exciting sports story lines, one that caught the nation's attention and began when Denver was 1-4 and made rookie Tim Tebow a starter. The one-time third-stringer promptly won six in a row and seven of eight, with a string of stunning comebacks (*an amazing one in overtime last weekend against the Pittsburgh Steelers!*), and the Broncos ended up backing into the AFC West title. Yes, I was, uh, up late doing sermon research last night; the Broncos didn't fare so well against the New England Patriots, receiving a drubbing from Tom Brady's crew ... but that didn't diminish the remarkable phenomenon of a young man who earned the admiration of a nation because of his perceived call to draw attention to the God he serves.

The lectionary readings today have as a common theme the idea of divine "calling". Each describes a dimension of what it means to be called by God: (a) the call to speak forth God's word in Samuel; as you read on in that chapter you'll find that obedience to that call meant Samuel had to say some very harsh and difficult things to a mentor he loved and admired. (b) The call to discipleship in John, where we see on display the important aspect of one's being called is to call attention to the One who called him/her in the first place. (c) The epistle lesson reminds us of the implications of our call, that once we are called, we are not our own ... we have been bought with a price, and we are to live moral lives that call attention to the One who bought us.

Some of you who are basketball fans may know the name A.C. Green (*A.C. is his actual name; these are not initials*). At the 2011 All Star Breakfast, A.C. Green was awarded the Bobby Jones Award for character, leadership, and faith in the world of basketball in the home and the community. A former NBA all-star and three time World Champion Los Angeles Laker, Green played in more consecutive games than any other player in NBA and ABA history. He played in 1,192 straight games (*he actually played in 1278 out of 1281 games in his career, with the three he missed coming in his second season*). If you know anything about the toll professional basketball takes on the body, you will be impressed with A.C. Green's record. I mean, my son plays basketball on Monday nights, and he often comes home bruised and limping after playing with folks like Eric McNeely and Matt Barber! A.C. Greene earned the nickname "Iron Man" for his amazing durability. Green is also a deeply committed Christian who, before his marriage at age 38 (*his first and only marriage*), was well-known in the NBA for his commitment to chastity. This is not a Kobe Bryant or a Wilt Chamberlain; this is a role model who took moral integrity and personal purity seriously. According to a report on CNN (*and also recounted in Wikipedia*), during his playing days on the road his teammates would frequently send women to his room to tempt Green to compromise his morals. Instead, he would respond by calmly quoting scripture like our epistle text this morning, "*Flee sexual immorality. Honor God with your body.*" He established the A. C. Green Youth Foundation that works with underprivileged youth and encourages sexual abstinence until marriage. Green says, with regard to sexual abstinence, "*If I can do it in the role that God took me on, traveling throughout the NBA, there's not a teenager who can tell me it's tougher on them!*" No one can argue with A. C. Green about that. He continued, "*When you have a vision, a purpose, and understand your calling, you can do extraordinary things for God,*

even in the midst of a peculiar situation. Living in the NBA for twenty years was very peculiar. But at the same time, it did not separate me from the goal I had: the burning passion that God put in my heart: to instill some kind of hope into our future generation, our kids.

As I was finishing this sermon yesterday, someone sent me the following in an email: TEACHER: "Glenn, how do you spell 'crocodile?'" GLENN: "K-R-O-K-A-D-I-A-L" TEACHER: "No, Glenn that's wrong." GLENN: "Maybe it is wrong, but you asked me how I spell it." We laugh, because we know that's not how it works, Glenn. And that's not how it works with morality, either! More and more these days people decide moral issues by what *they* think is right. But we are not our own, we have been bought with a price! And we are not on our own to call our own shots in areas of sexual morality; there are high, clear and pure directives given by God to those who have been called, standards of fidelity in marriage between a man and a woman and chastity outside of marriage, by which we honor God with our bodies.

In our Gospel reading, Jesus walks by John the Baptist. John declares to his followers, "*Behold, the Lamb of God!*" John directs people to Jesus; that is his role, his calling, his divinely appointed duty. The result is that two of his own disciples go on to follow Jesus. One of those two is Andrew, who immediately goes home to get his brother Simon, and then brings him to Jesus. Jesus then gives Simon the name "Peter." We last looked at this passage three years ago, and I asked you two questions: (1) *Who was the Andrew in your life, and (2) Whose Andrew are you?* I asked you to take a moment to reflect on that, and encouraged you to do so with appreciation. Who was the Andrew in your life? Who brought you to Jesus? Maybe it was one or both of your parents; maybe it was a friend. Maybe it was a sibling, a grandparent, an uncle, an aunt. Maybe it was a Sunday School teacher, a youth leader, maybe it was a professional athlete who publicly displayed his/her faith. Maybe it was a combination of any of these; I know I can name many faithful Andrews in my life. Who was your Andrew? And the second question is probably even more important: *Whose Andrew are you? Who have you directed to Jesus?* I hope you can enjoy the immense satisfaction that so many here enjoy, the satisfaction of knowing that someone is in some church worshipping today, perhaps even in this church this morning, because you have been ... or are being ... their Andrew.

We are told that the next day Jesus then calls Philip, who in turn goes to find Nathanael, saying "*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.*" Nathanael's response was to wonder, "*How in the world can anybody good come out of Nazareth?*" Nazareth was something of a depressed backwater town in the hills. Notice Philip does not argue, he does not cajole, nor does he trivialize Nathanael's doubt. He simply says "*Come and see.*" This is the essence of evangelism ... inviting others to come and see Jesus, just as Andrew invited Simon, just as Philip invited Nathanael. It is nothing more than saying, "*Look what I've found; come and see for yourself.*" Studies have shown some 80% of people who come to a new or a renewed faith in Jesus and join a local church do so because someone invited them to "Come and see." Perhaps the person inviting them didn't know a lot about the Bible, nor could they explain the doctrine of the Trinity, but they simply said, "*Come and see. Come and hear our choir. Come join us at circle or at 39ers or at youth fellowship or at the luncheon after church. Come and enjoy the warmth of a friendly bunch of people. Come and see!*" The best evangelism is simply bringing people to a place where they may meet Jesus, Who promises to be present whenever two or three are gathered in His name. And that's something every one of us can do. But to clarify: The invitation ultimately is not just an invitation to come and see our choir, or the pastor, or to come meet a wonderful group of people or meet a potential mate, or be relieved of your kids for an hour or two. Yes, it is all these things and more, but the ultimate offer, the invitation, is to come and see Jesus, Who is the reason for and focus of our worship.

This is part and parcel of what you and I have been called to do: Issue an invitation. In polite society, we tell ourselves there are two things we don't talk about: Religion and Politics. Why? Because both usually lead to arguments. However, this is not about arguing; this is about simply saying "*Come and see.*" Come and experience the power of God present in this place where Jesus Christ is present, where Jesus Christ is welcoming, embracing, loving and changing all of us for His own sake. We are not perfect, we don't know it all, but He is and He does! Philip risks the invitation, and Nathanael comes to see for himself. And notice what happens: Jesus sees them coming, and it is Jesus who speaks to Nathanael's doubt, it is Jesus Who reveals Himself in what He says, and it is Jesus Who causes Nathanael's skepticism to fall away.

This is what the call of God is about. This is not just for the professionally religious. Whether you think so or not, people listen to you, they respect what you have to say, and they develop a trust in who you are and what you represent. Don't be afraid or ashamed to use your influence, position, power, and presence to call their attention to Jesus ... through your deeds, through your words, through your kind invitations. Invite them to your church. Who God really needs to speak for Him are ordinary people who can say, "Come and see." And then trust Jesus to do any convincing! I simply do not believe that people are not interested in Jesus today. I mean, just witness how Tim Tebow became the Most Admired Athlete this week ... people are hungry for hope, for authenticity, for genuine wholeness. I believe they are deeply interested! This does not mean you have to be perfect, nor does it mean the church has to be perfect. The One we worship is perfect, not us. People are not looking for perfection today. They are looking for hope, they are looking for authenticity, they are looking for community, AND they are hungry to have a sense of God's presence: person to person and flesh to flesh. They are just waiting for someone to invite them to "Come and See," for people who will direct them to the Lord they serve.