

Come and See

SESSION

1

*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.”*

—John 1:38-39

INTRODUCTION

Think of a time when friends told you about a beautiful place or sight, but you were hesitant to believe that it was as gorgeous as they described it. You were hesitant to believe them because you wanted to experience it for yourself. When John the Baptizer declares, “Look, here is the Lamb of God!” (1:36), two of those who will become disciples are at first only curious. “Where are you staying?” they ask Jesus. Jesus responds simply by saying, “Come and see” (1:38-39). The two soon-to-be disciples do what Jesus says, and a chain reaction begins. By the end of Chapter 1, there are five men—at first only curious—who follow Jesus. Yet before they moved in Jesus’ direction, they had to see for themselves!

DAILY ASSIGNMENTS

DAY ONE: John 1–21

Read quickly through the entire Gospel of John. Take note of the major elements in the whole story and how it is told. Be alert to patterns in Jesus' speeches or in the progress of the narrative and make note of them. What portions of John's narrative hold your attention? What portions do you find difficult to grasp?

DAY TWO: John 1:1-18

After reading this passage in John, look at the way the other Gospels introduce Jesus by reading Matthew 1:1–2:23; Mark 1:1-3; and Luke 1:1–2:52. What theme does John stress in these first eighteen verses? How does Exodus 33:18–34:8 influence your understanding of John 1:18? Write your own brief summary of the passage and how you think it differs from the other Gospels.

DAY THREE: John 1:19-51

After reading the day's assignment in John's Gospel, read the accounts of John the Baptizer in Matthew 3:1-17; Mark 1:1-11; and Luke 1:5-24, 57-80; 3:1-22. Make note of the essential features of John the Baptizer in each of the four Gospels. Then consider this question: What unique contribution to our understanding of Jesus does John the Baptizer make? How is Isaiah 40:3 so important to John the Baptizer's identity? How does Isaiah 53:7 illuminate what John the Baptizer means when he calls Jesus the "Lamb of God" (John 1:36)? Why do you think John does not tell the story of Jesus' baptism by

Come and See

John the Baptizer? In 1:35-51, Jesus calls his first disciples. How does each of the disciples mentioned in this passage come to Jesus? What does Jesus mean when he invites the first two disciples to “come and see”? Think about how you would describe your own call to discipleship.

DAY FOUR: John 2:1-12

John describes the changing of water into wine as the first of Jesus’ “signs” and that it “revealed his glory” (2:11). On the basis of this story, how would you think John wants us to understand a “sign”? What features of this story puzzle you or impress you?

DAY FIVE: John 2:13-23

Read the stories of the cleansing of the Temple in Matthew 21:12-17; Mark 11:15-19; and Luke 19:45-46. What is the most important difference between John’s account and those in the Synoptic Gospels? According to John, what was the meaning of Jesus’ cleansing of the Temple?

DAY SIX:

Read the commentary in the participant book.

COME AND SEE

In the first chapter of the Gospel of John, Jesus' simple invitation to "come and see" is intriguing. First, it introduces the theme of seeing, which appears throughout the narrative. Second, it seems this invitation language is prompted by the question of where Jesus is staying. It seems a simple question, but it hints at something more. The word *staying* translates the Greek word *menein* (MA-NAYN), which takes on several meanings in John's Gospel. The word is often translated "abide," as in Jesus' metaphor about the vine and branches in 15:1-7. An interesting side note here is that in John 14:2, the term *dwelling places* (those in God's house) is a translation of the Greek noun *monai* (MO-NAY), which is based on the verb form used in John 1 to mean "stay" or "remain."

A TIME BEFORE TIME

Before we get too far ahead of ourselves in these first two chapters, we should linger a moment on that fascinating passage in 1:1-18, known as the Prologue. John begins his Gospel with the summons to imagine a mysterious "beginning"—the time before time. The passage reads like poetry, evoking emotions of all kinds. John's words are chosen to leave hearers awestruck, contemplating the picture of the "Word" (*logos*, LA-GAHS) alongside that of God. Through the activity of this *logos*, this Word, who is both "life" and "light," God creates all that is. John declares that "the Word *was with* God, and the Word *was* God" (1:1, italics added for emphasis). What can this mean? Could it be that the most important meaning of *logos* is that this Word (Jesus) brought into the world the possibility of living as God always intended for us to live?

Reading further in the Prologue, notice the opposition of light and darkness in 1:4-5. It is the first of a whole group of what we might call opposing realities. John 1:6-8 makes clear that John the Baptizer is not the light but rather the witness to the light. It is quite likely that some thought John the Baptizer himself was the long-awaited Messiah.

The light of the *logos* intrudes into the world but is rejected by "his own" (1:11). Yet, those who accept him are given a unique power—a power (or authority) to become who they are really meant to be. Rejected though he is, the *logos* becomes a flesh-and-blood human being who "camped out" (a more literal translation of the word translated as "lived" in the NRSV) with us in this world. Through him, believers are able to see God's "glory."

In other words, for those who believe in him, the incarnate Word shows them who God is.

Another reference to John the Baptizer's witness (1:15) is followed by the climax of the Prologue's introduction. Christ brought "grace and truth" (1:17) into the world. The *logos* brought us a means of connecting or identifying with God's loving intention for humanity. (It might be compared with how three-dimensional glasses enable us to see depth as well as height and length.) The gift of grace and truth supplements the will of God for human behavior revealed by Moses. However, let there be no doubt: Christ alone has seen God (Exodus 33:18–23), for he originates in the very heart of God.

This dramatic and provocative introduction sets a tone for the whole Gospel. It invites us to look for God's purpose for us and our world as we read this account of Jesus, God's Word to the world.

THE BAPTIZER'S MESSAGE

The Prologue of the Gospel introduces us to John the Baptizer (1:6-8, 15). Now we get some more details. The religious authorities send representatives to find out just who Jesus thinks he is. Notice that in 1:19 these representatives are said to be sent by the Jews. In 1:24, however, the examiners are sent out by the Pharisees. This is one of the clearest examples of how John uses "the Jews" to speak of religious authorities. We will return to this question later.

John the Baptizer makes plain that he does not pretend to be Christ (that is, the Messiah). After rejecting the notion that he is Elijah, in 1:23 John simply says he is "the voice of one crying out in

Pharisees

The Gospels are critical of the Pharisees, but in fact they were a devout group of Jewish laymen who sought to obey the Law fully. They voluntarily took on themselves the obligation to obey the laws applicable only to the priests. They were not self-righteous but were trying to determine what it meant to be faithful to God. They were the church's first opponents, but they should not be taken as typical of the Jewish people.

the wilderness, / ‘Make straight the way of the Lord’” (referring to Isaiah 40:3). He baptizes only with water to prepare the way for one who will baptize with the Spirit. He witnesses to what he has seen. What more can we do than share what we have seen or experienced?

But wait! John the Baptizer has something more to say. Watching Jesus, he declares, “Here is the Lamb of God” (John 1:29-36), who relieves us of our sins and frees us of confused lives. John the Baptizer explains he was forewarned that the one on whom the Spirit descended would be the one who would baptize with the Spirit. Here John the Baptizer shares what he has been privileged to learn.

There are a couple of teasers in this passage. The first has to do with how and when Christ would “baptize” with the Holy Spirit (1:33). These words give us a peek into what comes much later. In John 20, we will learn how the risen Christ bestows the Spirit on his disciples. Already in his opening chapter, John is hinting at where his whole Gospel story is going. The second teaser is John’s naming Jesus the “Lamb of God.” What does John want us to know? The lamb could be: (1) the one who delivers the world from evil according to the Book of Revelation; (2) the “suffering servant” described in Isaiah 53:7; or (3) the lamb slain and eaten at Passover (although we have no evidence the Passover lamb was thought of as taking away sin). The third option seems most likely, as we will see later when we discuss Jesus’ crucifixion.

COME ALONG WITH ME

Among the four Gospel writers, John alone suggests that some of Jesus’ disciples had been disciples of John the Baptizer. Their leader’s announcement that Jesus is the “Lamb of God” apparently stirred their curiosity, and they came to follow Jesus. When they inquired as to where Jesus was staying, they expected to be told something along the lines of the Holiday Inn in Cana. But that was not what Jesus had in mind when he issued his invitation. Jesus’ words “Come and see” (1:39) hint at something more: We must pick up and follow where Jesus *goes* to discover where he really *stays*. The destination of a journey with Jesus cannot be understood ahead of time but can only be experienced along the way. Following Jesus is a bit like learning to swim. The only way to learn what swimming is like is to get in the water and start paddling away.

So begins the chain reaction of following Jesus. One of the two disciples who address Jesus in John 1 is Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother; he eventually invites Peter to come and see Jesus. When Peter does, he is renamed (1:42): Simon the fisherman becomes Cephas (or Peter) the rock. The message is

short and simple: Following Jesus changes the follower forever and can be as drastic as receiving a brand-new name.

Next it is Philip who is called with the simple invitation “Follow me” (1:43), which ironically means much more than being led around. Then it is Philip’s turn to issue the invitation. He tantalizes Nathanael with the declaration that this Jesus is the long-promised Messiah (1:45). But Nathanael is skeptical. He can’t believe that the little burg of Nazareth could produce anyone of extraordinary importance. Nathanael’s skepticism is met with the same haunting invitation that started this whole chain reaction and triggered one invitation after another. However, Nathanael receives special attention from Jesus. He declares that Nathanael is a faithful Israelite, and Nathanael is astonished by Jesus’ knowledge. Jesus, however, responds with what we might call, “You ain’t seen nothing yet!” He will eventually see Jesus exalted in ways we can only imagine for now.

The calling of the disciples is saturated with implications for discipleship. From the first allurements—“Come and see”—to the promise of a wondrous realization of who this Jesus is, these first followers are tweaked with clues, but ones that must be experienced some time in the future. Isn’t that the nature even of our discipleship?

THE SIGN AT THE WEDDING

In the beginning of John 2, the scene suddenly shifts. Details are missing, but the heart of the story is clear. The guests at a wedding run out of wine; Jesus is told of this embarrassment; then he changes the plain water set aside for purification into fine wine. We’re not certain for what sort of purification the water was used. It may have been simply for the ritual washing of hands before and after a meal. Whatever the case may be, John clearly hints that Jesus’ wine is a replacement for a Jewish custom of the time; for the wine Jesus presents is not just any wine but the very finest of wines. And notice that within this fairly simple plot is an interesting exchange between Jesus and his mother (about whom we have heard nothing until now). She seems to think that Jesus will feel for the embarrassed hosts and might do something to correct the situation. More than that we must conjure up by imagination.

Jesus’ response to his mother’s request is puzzling for at least three reasons. First, this is the initial incidence of Jesus referring to a female as “woman.” We find it again in 4:21; 8:10; 19:26; and 20:15. It sounds jarring to our contemporary ear. Yet in Jesus’ day, it was not in any sense an insulting or demean-

Hour

Refers to the time of Jesus' arrest, trial, crucifixion, and resurrection. The statement *His hour had not yet come* is scattered throughout the chapters of John, along with the promise that the hour will eventually come and finally the announcement that it has come.

- The hour has not come – 2:4; 7:30; 8:20.
- The hour is promised – 4:21, 23; 5:25, 28; 16:2, 25.
- The hour comes – 12:23; 13:1; 16:32.

intended to evoke the disciples' faith (2:11). Again, we will need to watch for future occurrences of this word. For now, it is enough to recognize that by "sign" Jesus and John mean an act by which Jesus' identity is revealed. In turning water into wine, Jesus powerfully demonstrates the glory of his relationship with God.

ing address, as it can be today. It may actually have been Jesus' normal way of addressing a woman. His point is to make clear that neither he nor his mother should assume responsibility for the shortage of wine at the wedding, implying even that it would be presumptuous to do so.

Second, Jesus seems hesitant to do anything because his "hour has not yet come" (John 2:4). At this early stage in the narrative, we have no clue as to what that statement means. However, we will soon learn that when Jesus speaks the word *hour*, he means the decisive time, the climactic moment, and the occasion of his death.

Third, the incident is called a sign, or in John's Greek *sēmeia* (SAY-MAY-AH), a term

CLEANING OUT THE TEMPLE

At last we come to a story common to all the Gospels (Matthew 21:12-17; Mark 11:15-18; Luke 19:45-46; John 2:13-23). But what is it doing so early in John's narrative? For the Synoptic Gospel writers, Jesus' cleansing of the Temple was an event associated with the final days of his ministry, and it took place during his first and only trip to Jerusalem. Regardless of the timing, though, all four Gospels connect the event with the Jewish Passover, one of the high holy days for Jewish worshipers, just as it continues to be to this day.

Passover recalls and reenacts that final dreadful plague visited on the Egyptians as a means of freeing the Hebrew people from their slavery. The angel of death moved among the Egyptians, killing every firstborn child but “passing over” the Jews’ homes, where the doors were marked with the blood of a lamb. Passover is the occasion on which all the Gospels say Jesus was arrested, tried, and crucified. However, in John’s story of Jesus, the incident in the Temple occurs during the first of Jesus’ three visits to Jerusalem for the celebration of the Passover.

As all four Gospels report, Jesus drove the money changers out of the Temple grounds. These “business men” exchanged foreign coins for the Jewish money used in the Temple and sold pigeons (or, as John has it, sheep and cattle) for ritual sacrifices. These clever men made the most of the predicament of the Jews who came to Jerusalem from all around the Mediterranean world for this occasion. (We need not travel far before we learn to beware those who claim to offer a generous exchange rate for our money.) John reports that Jesus fashioned a whip with which he could drive the animals off the Temple grounds. Much like the story in the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus declares that this sacred place—“my Father’s house” (2:16)—should not be a trading place. The occasion reminds the disciples of Psalm 69:9.

The Gospels of Mark and Luke say that the response to Jesus’ presumptuous act was the effort to have him killed. In John, it sparks a lively discussion between him and the Jews. What right does he have to upset a regular Passover custom? What are his credentials? Jesus counters with an enigmatic and puzzling statement: “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (John 2:19). Here is our first clear occurrence of a favorite theme in John: Jesus makes a statement of some sort (often figurative), and the hearers misunderstand it. In this case, the religious authorities naturally think he is referring to the Temple structure that was not even finished at the time. The effort to

Sign

A deed by means of which Jesus shows his true identity. Often the deed is a wondrous act, such as a healing.

However, Jesus is cautious about the response of people to his signs, suggesting that a faith based on signs is not genuine (see 4:48). Eight acts are considered signs in John: 2:1-11; 4:46-54; 5:1-9; 6:1-14; 6:15-21; 9:1-8; 11:1-46; and 21:1-14.

rebuild Solomon's Temple began soon after its destruction by the Babylonians around 587–586 B.C. During Jesus' life, it was now undergoing renovations begun by King Herod around 20 B.C. The suggestion that Jesus might rebuild it in only three days understandably astonishes his critics. John intercedes to explain that Jesus was referring to his body and that his words here were later interpreted as a prediction of his death and resurrection.

John 2:23-25 indicates that because of his "signs," Jesus wins some followers during his time in Jerusalem. However, Jesus has powers to perceive what others are thinking, and he is suspicious of their faith. Such a foreboding note begins to prepare us for what is to come.

INVITATION TO DISCIPLESHIP

What a marvelous picture of Christian discipleship John 1–2 gives us. The first verses of John's Prologue express the reason we are disciples. We are invited to receive the Christ and "become children of God" (1:12). Our commitment entails allowing the light of Christ to fill our lives. Discipleship begins with the response of faith.

But there is more! Like the first disciples, we are invited to "come and see"—to venture on a journey with Jesus and our Christian community. This invitation is founded on the witness of our predecessor John the Baptizer. And the journey's goal is to stand under the cross when Christ is "lifted up" (3:14).

Nonetheless, this discipleship is filled with conflicts, doubts, and even confusion. Commitment is not simple, and Jesus does not promise us an easy road. With Jesus, we are invited to bump up against even the religious establishment of the day, something as full of risk and danger in our day as it was in Jesus' day.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

One of the roots of the concept of the Word (*logos*) in John 1:1-18 is the Jewish notion of Wisdom (*sophia*, SO-FE-AH). The apocryphal books of the Old Testament are a collection of documents, many of which were included in some editions of the Bible. One of these books is Ecclesiasticus, or the Wisdom of Jesus, Son of Sirach, which dates from around 180 B.C. Portions of the book have to do with an understanding of Wisdom in Jewish thought just before the birth of Christianity. The following quotation from Sirach shows the connections between the ideas of *sophia* (Wisdom) and *logos* (Word). The passage supposes that Wisdom existed before creation and talks about how Wisdom is dwelling in the earth, sounding much like John's use of the Greek word *skānoō* (SKAY-NAH-AH-O), meaning "tenting" in John 1:14 to describe Jesus' incarnation.

Wisdom praises herself, / and tells of her glory in the midst of the people. / In the assembly of the Most High she opens her mouth, / and in the presence of his hosts she tells of her glory:..."Then the Creator of all things gave me a command, / and my Creator chose the place for my tent. / He said, 'Make your dwelling in Jacob, / and in Israel receive your inheritance.' / Before the ages, in the beginning, he created me, / and for all the ages I shall not cease to be. / In the holy tent I ministered before him, / and so I was established in Zion.
—Sirach 24:1-2, 8-10

How do the ideas of Wisdom and Word connect? What do they have in common? Reflect on how living in and for Christ entails a special kind of Wisdom.