

## **Session C: Come and See Jesus (Evangelism)**

**Prayer:** Dear God, *help us bring others to meet you and to know you.* Grant that we may show the power of your love to those near us. Help us share your word and sacraments. Lead us and prepare us to share our experiences of you with each of your children who need you in their lives. Help us help others become your disciples. Amen.

### **Scripture Reflection: John 1:43-51**

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

Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip 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." Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see."

When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, "Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!" Nathanael asked him, "Where did you get to know me?" Jesus answered, "I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you." Nathanael replied, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"

Jesus answered, "Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these." And 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."

### *Discussion Questions*

What did you hear?

Who is making the call? Who is making the invitation? (Jesus chooses the people who will be called; we only make the invitation.)

Why are we afraid to make invitations?

What would help us become more comfortable in making invitations?

Have you had personal experiences of invitation (to "Come and See") that have helped you along your spiritual path?

## **The Importance of Evangelism**

Jesus' last words in Luke are "You are witnesses of these things." You need to proclaim repentance and forgiveness of sins in my name to all nations. He says the same thing in his last words in each gospel! In Mark, he says "Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation." Jesus' last words in John are "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." And perhaps most familiar, Jesus' last words in Matthew are "Go, therefore and make disciples of all nations."

Jesus tells his disciples to witness and proclaim his love and mercy to everyone. Of course, he does this because he wants to make disciples of all nations. But he also wants us to realize

that we only really become disciples by proclaiming and witnessing Jesus' presence in our lives. As we proclaim Jesus, Jesus comes to be with us. We experience his presence.

In proclaiming the good news, we become the Body of Christ. We become Christ's arms and legs, hands and feet, eyes and mouth. And because Jesus is with us, our lives, our bodies, like our risen Lord's, can become places where God is revealed in this world.

Think of the differences in Peter before and after the resurrection! In Acts 4:5-12, we meet a new Peter, a Peter who has become a Christian, Peter the rock. This is not the same man who denied Jesus to save himself. Peter has just healed a man "lame from birth." He proclaims, "I have no silver or gold, but what I have I give you; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk." And Peter takes the man by the right hand and raises him up.

Peter proclaims Christ, and Jesus is present with Peter to heal this man. Many people are amazed and Peter seizes the opportunity to preach repentance and forgiveness of sins just as Jesus told him to. Peter and John are then arrested "because they were teaching the people and proclaiming that in Jesus there is the resurrection of the dead." In this dangerous situation, we see the new Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, not denying Jesus but proclaiming to the authorities that this healing is done "by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom God raised from the dead." The authorities warn Peter and John "to speak no more to anyone in Jesus' name," but they answer, "We cannot keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard."

This is the enthusiasm of the early followers of Jesus, of the early church. The Holy Spirit further kindled the fire of this enthusiasm with each proclamation of Jesus. This is the kind of passion we desire, the kind of passion of those disciples who returned from Emmaus with eyes opened and hearts burning. We may not fully experience this passion unless we too witness and proclaim Jesus.

Jesus asks us not to be afraid to proclaim his name, not to be afraid to invite others into his presence. He says, "Remember, I am with you always" and "I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name."

Jesus tells us that he is present with us when we live in and proclaim his name. Imagine sharing the Good News of the joy of your faith and, in that sharing, having Jesus powerfully present in and through you. As you reflect on where you are called to serve Jesus in your community and the world, ask yourself "How can I boldly proclaim his resurrected presence in my life?" Because I want his presence in my life. My ministries need to become my mission for Jesus, and so I need to witness and to proclaim his name.

Jesus says, "I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask in my name" (John 14:12-13). Jesus is risen! And he will be with us in our lives and ministries when we remember to proclaim his name.

## **How do People Come to Our Church Community?**

Answer the following questions on worksheets or note cards and then discuss questions 3 through 5 as a group:

1. Why are you a member of this church? What keeps you coming to church?
2. How were you invited into the congregation?
3. How are new people invited into this community?
4. What else could we do to invite people into this community?
5. Do we need more people here? Why? How many?

### *Group Discussion*

How do people come to this church community?

List evangelism opportunities: Alpha; Small groups; Newcomer's Committee; Worship (music, liturgy, preaching, prayer); Pastoral care; Fellowship opportunities; Outreach; Educational opportunities; birth; marriage; funerals

Look at growth statistics and demographics.

How many?

Average weekly (Saturday and Sunday) attendance?

Where do they live?

Educational levels?

Economic levels?

Ages?

How diverse?

What type of person would find a home in this church?

Do different services, groups or activities have different populations?)

How are we doing in inviting others into this community?

What does this community value in the area of evangelism?

How are we going to bring new disciples to church?

What will new people find here when they come?

## **How do We Bring Others to Church?**

As we discern visions for helping Jesus make disciples, many of us are not sure how to invite people into our church community. Or perhaps we are a little afraid. Typical Christians today are naturally uncomfortable knocking on doors or confronting people with the Word. It is comforting to find statistics showing that only about ten percent of all Christians have the gift of evangelism and are outspoken individuals who are comfortable and effective in confronting people with the Gospel. This might suggest that we could leave this evangelization stuff to the gifted people.

Lacking the gift of evangelism should bother each of us, however, if we wish to see others accept Jesus as Lord. We should be concerned about the decline in church membership

during the last 35 years! Evangelism is now more important than ever because people do not necessarily feel that they need to go to church. Church members who say that others will eventually “come back” to church forget that ever greater numbers of people either have never been to church or were dissatisfied with church and left to look for something else. The traditional strategy of simply having an attractive church with good programs is no longer a strategy for bringing people into church. We cannot simply “attract” people to church, we need to “reach” them. We need to go out and meet people and bring them home.

When Jesus said, “Go therefore and make disciples” (Matthew 29:19), he meant each of us. We each need to use our spiritual gifts and personality to build relationships, to work together to network people into the church, and to draw others to Jesus. This process should not be difficult or scary.

Three Biblical stories of people inviting others to come and see Jesus are exemplary – the stories of Andrew (John 1:35-42), Philip (John 1:43-51) and the woman at the well (John 4:7-30). Each of these people simply shared Christ with people they already knew. Evangelism is most effective when we deal with existing relationships – our friends, relatives, neighbors, coworkers, and so on. Nine out of ten people who come to church and stay come on the arm of someone they know.

If we wish to bring people we know to church, a first step is simply making friends. We generally make friends by spending time together and sharing activities – like playing golf or having a barbecue. These activities do not need to be at church or church-related. Most of us already can think of friends or acquaintances who do not attend a church and who should. We need to start praying for these people, make them a bigger part of our lives and see what happens. We are not trying to convert people to a theology, we are simply making friends.

If we want our friends to become part of our church community, we need to introduce them to our church friends. A second step in inviting people to church is including our church friends in small group activities with our non-church friends. This is really important because people who do not go to church have one main concern about church: The question they ask is “Are these people normal?” You can see why people might have this concern from the way Christians are portrayed on television and in movies. But if a person likes you and you genuinely like them, the person may want to be part of your church.

In addition to making friends and introducing them to our church friends, we need to introduce God into our relationships. This third step may make us uncomfortable but we will have opportunities to do this. When our friends are sick or have sick friends or relatives, we can ask if we may pray for them. When we share a meal, we may offer a blessing. Or we may share our own faith experiences at an appropriate time. If we pray for our friends to find Jesus, God often makes us part of this process. The Holy Spirit gives us opportunities to share our faith with our friends. Eventually, some of us will invite our mutual friends to church.

We can each go and meet people and bring them home: by making friends, introducing them to our church friends and introducing God into our conversations. Although you may not be the one who actually leads a person to Jesus and witnesses the conversion experience, you can take a vital role in helping a friend take one more step toward accepting Jesus; and you only have to be yourself.

Saint Paul says, "So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!" (II Corinthians 5:17) And Jesus says, "We had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found" (Luke 15:32). This is the joy we experience as individuals and as a church community when we become part of this experience of saving love. "Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the father has sent me, so I send you'" (John 20:21).

### Goal Starters

Some goals will come from fully answering the following questions:

What does God seem to be calling the congregation to do at this time? (It may be that the ministry of the past few years is affirmed and continued. It is also possible that while the former direction of ministry is affirmed, the congregation will recognize that new challenges call for new resources.)

What resources do we bring to the mission of the church in the area of evangelism and what resources do we need to bring?

What outside resources do we need (skills, networks for sharing, consultants, workshops, training, funding, support)?

What are the main goals of the church?

When will they be accomplished?

Who is responsible for accomplishing these goals?

Goals might look like this:

Goals and strategies	When	Whom	Benchmarks/Strategies
<b>We will worship God by becoming disciples who help Jesus make new and stronger disciples</b>			
<b>Evangelism Goal: Go and make disciples. Grow an average of ____% per year in average weekend attendance to _____ by 20__.</b>			
Develop new _____ worship service		Clergy	Develop an A service with a critical mass
Strengthen and grow Youth Ministry		Youth Ministry Team	Develop strategies by _____
Reflection/study about evangelism		Church Board	Consider <u>The Celtic Way of Evangelism</u> by Hunter or <u>Entertaining Angels: Hospitality Programs for the Caring Church</u> by Geitz
Develop greeting process		Evangelism Team	Have in place for each service

Develop visit follow up process		Evangelism Team	Have in place for each service
Develop mentoring/shepherding process		Evangelism Team	Have in place for each service
Introduce Invitational Events		Evangelism Team	Bring a friend activities vs. church centered activities
Begin training in relational evangelism		Evangelism Team	Some members take Contagious Christian or similar training

### **Resources for Further Study**

Geitz, Elizabeth Rankin. Entertaining Angels: Hospitality Programs for the Caring Church. Morehouse, 1993.

Halverson, Delia. The Gift of Hospitality: In Church, in the Home, in All of Life. Chalice, 1999.

Hanchey, Howard. Church Growth and the Power of Evangelism: Ideas that Work. Cowley, 1990.

Hunter, George G. III. The Celtic Way of Evangelism: How Christianity Can Reach the West...Again. Abingdon, 2000.

Kujawa, Sheryl A., ed. Disorganized Religion: The Evangelization of Youth and Young Adults. Cowley, 1998.

Oswald, Roy M. Making Your Church More Inviting: A Step-by-Step Guide for In-Church Training. Alban Institute, 1992.

Pippert, Rebecca Manley. Out of the Saltshaker & Into the World. Intervarsity, 1999.