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Inviting: Seeing and Sharing Jesus

John 1:29-42

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Think about an experience you had **when someone invited you** to something that you really enjoyed which blessed or touched your life. Who invited you? Where did you go or what did you experience together? As a kid maybe someone invited you to come over and play, to attend a sleepover or a birthday party, or as you got a little older to attend a party or a dance, a graduation, or a wedding, or maybe to share a meal together, to see a show or go to a game. One of the great invitations I received was when my friend Joe Shapiro called me in October of 2013 and invited me to attend Game 6 of the World Series between the St. Louis Cardinals and the Boston Red Sox at Fenway Park and we saw the Red Sox clinch a World Series at home for the first time in 95 years!

Now recall an experience **when you invited someone else** to something that you really enjoyed which blessed or touched your life and theirs. Who did you invite? Where did you go or what did you experience together? It could be something as simple as inviting someone to go for a walk and it could change your life forever. That happened to me when I invited Jill to go for a walk in April of 1985. We're not the only ones who have had that experience. Many people have gone for a walk and their life has never been the same. That's what happens in the first chapter of John's Gospel when a man named John invites Andrew to see Jesus, Andrew in turn invited his brother Simon to go for a walk to meet Jesus. Listen to John 1:29-42.

"The next day **he saw** Jesus coming toward him and declared, ***'Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.' I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel.'***" And John testified, ***"I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and***

remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God.”

The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, and as he **watched** Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, “**Look**, here is ***the Lamb of God!***” The two disciples heard him say this, and **they followed Jesus**. 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.**” **They came and saw** where he was staying, and they **remained with him** that day. It was about four o’clock in the afternoon. One of the two who heard John speak and **followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother**. He **first found his brother Simon** and said to him, “***We have found the Messiah***” (which is translated Anointedj). **He 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 Peterl).”

When you’re reading the Bible, it’s helpful to look for words, phrases, or images that are repeated. There are several in this passage and I tried to make them obvious by how I read it. **This passage is about Seeing & Sharing Jesus. Did you hear all the words and phrases related to seeing? (review underlined references in scripture above)**

The Fourth Gospel believes **When You See Jesus, You Share Jesus**. That’s what John the Baptist and Andrew did. **When they saw Jesus, they invited someone else to see Jesus too**. They couldn’t help themselves. Some news you don’t want to keep to yourself. Being an inviting person is a fun way to live. When we’re inviting we’re looking to include people in something that’s beneficial, helpful, enjoyable, or even life changing. That’s the feeling expressed in the **invitation to worship** that began our service, **Psalm 95:1**, “***O come, let us sing to the LORD; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!***” We don’t want anyone to miss out or feel left out, like some poor soul trying to buy Taylor Swift tickets on Ticketmaster. The more the merrier is often true. It’s not a

j Or *Christ*

l From the word for *rock* in Aramaic (*kepha*) and Greek (*petra*), respectively

good feeling when you know other people are invited to something special and you're not. Be an inviter, be someone who enlarges the circle of friendship and participation. If you're engaging with us online or here in person I hope you're doing so because worshiping God and a relationship with Jesus and God's people are a blessing in your life; that they're beneficial and even enjoyable.

Yet the vast majority of people on Cape Cod and in New England don't have what most of us have - a relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ. People need to hear the good news about the God who loves them and sent His Son Jesus to teach them how to live as God's children and who died as the Lamb of God so that we might be forgiven and how God raised him from the dead. Through Christ we're given the opportunity for eternal, abundant, joyful life that begins now – who wouldn't want that? This is good news!

Who do you think are the best people to bring this good news to people who haven't heard it? Television evangelists? Christian radio programs or someone on the Internet? Pastors? What if the answer is **you**. Followers of Jesus who live, work, and go to school with people who don't know Christ are often the best ones to help connect these people with God. Through our relationships with the people around us who don't yet follow Jesus, we can share with them in ways that are appropriate the good news about who Jesus is and what Jesus has done **for us** and can do **for them**.

I want to challenge you to be more inviting, and I don't mean just inviting other people to worship and events at BBC, which I hope you will do. I mean **enlarging the circle of your life** because so many people feel lonely, isolated, depressed, and weary. Jesus tells us to be the kind of person who **Invites Those Who Can't Reciprocate**. Invite and share with those who can't return the favor. Jesus says (**Luke 14:13-14**), *"But when you give a banquet, **invite** the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. **And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.**"*

Another invitation of Jesus is found in **Matthew 11:28** where he says, ***"Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I***

will give you rest.” This is an invitation not only for you, but you can share it with people you know who are hurting.

Some of you might be thinking, I don't know what to say or how to be inviting. Here are some hopefully helpful hints:

1. Be Authentic –The truth of the Christian faith is demonstrated by a life that has been noticeably marked by God's love and leadership. Joe Aldrich said in his book, *Lifestyle Evangelism*, that “*Christians are to **be** good news before they **share** the good news.*” One of the reasons why younger people and many others are walking away from the church is because so many people who publicly claim to be Christ followers don't speak or act anything like Jesus does and it turns people off. We need **to be good news** before we **share the good news** and our life should flow authentically out of a genuine, living relationship with Jesus where his love for people passes through us to others.

2. Be Yourself– you don't have to be someone you're not. How you're inviting, how you speak, and share will reflect your own personality, interests, and temperament. Almost anything you enjoy doing for fun or a hobby can be a means of getting to know people who don't know Jesus.

3. Be Personal – There are two approaches to reaching people who need Jesus, personal or impersonal. People are more open to talking with a friend they already know than they are to being influenced by a tract, direct mail, a stranger showing up at their door, or another impersonal approach. That's not to say those methods have never led anyone to Christ, but now they are far less effective. Think about it this way, when you need advice on a crucial decision or need help with a problem you're facing, would you rather talk to someone you don't know personally, or to someone you know and trust. When it comes to personal issues or spiritual questions, doubts, or seeking, people are more likely to confide in a faithful friend.

4. Be Prepared to tell your story and the gospel story. Inviting people to a relationship with Jesus is more than just building friendships and hoping others notice the difference in your life and figure out all by themselves without you ever saying a word that the reason you're so marvelous is because of the impact of

Jesus on your life. Paul said in **Romans 10:14** (Living Bible), *“But how shall they ask him to save them unless they believe in him? And how can they believe in him if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear about him unless someone tells them?”*

For people to get the Christian message, someone has to explain it to them, and our actions and words need to go together. **We’re to live and share the gospel** and how God’s story of love has become our story. **1 Peter 3:15-16**, *“In your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect.”* Sadly, it is gentleness and respect that are so often missing from too many people in the public eye who claim they’re Christian.

So be authentic, be yourself, be personal, and be prepared to share your story and the gospel story. For most people coming to faith is not a one-time event but a process that takes time. We don’t want to pressure anyone. It takes time to understand the Christian message, believe it, and act on it. Some people commit themselves to Jesus the very first time they hear the message, for other people it takes time. We help bring people along step by step.

Sometimes, God uses one person to bring someone through the process of coming to faith in Jesus. More often God uses a number of people, places, events, and circumstances to lovingly draw people to Jesus. We don’t have to feel that we carry the full burden of leading family members and friends all the way to the point of trusting Jesus. Cliff Knechtle wrote in the book, *Give Me An Answer*, *“A person’s coming to Christ is like a chain with many links. There is the first link, middle links, and a last link. There are many influences and conversations that precede a person’s decision to convert to Christ. I know the joy of being the first link at times, a middle link usually, and occasionally the last link. God has not called me to only be the last link. He has called me to be faithful and to love all people.”*

What you can do: Pray for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit, pray for Boldness and Love to be an inviting person and to Share the Good News. Pray

for sensitivity and awareness to the people God's brings across your path. See encounters with people whether family, friends, co-workers, customers, classmates, or strangers as divine appointments and opportunities, and not as random. **Write down the names of three people you'll begin praying for** – that God would open opportunities for you to share with them your story and God's story, and whose story you can listen to and learn.

There's a card in your bulletin with the highlights of the upcoming Advent and Christmas season, give it to someone who doesn't attend a local church and invite them to join you at one event. You could even offer to bring them. If you know someone who's hurting or grieving, we'll have a Blue Christmas service on December 4 at 2:00 pm. Moms and other women who are busy and have too much to do and too little time, maybe you could invite one of your busy friends to the women's Christmas communion service at 6:00 pm on Tuesday, December 13th. That service will be about taking time to be still. Or when anyone asks you, "What are your plans for Christmas?" You can tell them you're planning to go to one of our four Christmas Eve services, or worship and Christmas dinner on Christmas morning.

I encourage you to make it a personal goal to influence and invite at least one other person to get to know Jesus and become involved in BBC by coming to worship or watching online, by getting connected with a ministry team, a group, a class, or a mission project. Remember, God calls us to **be witnesses**, a witness testifies to what he or she has seen, heard, and experienced. John the Baptist was a witness, Andrew was a witness. **We're not called to be a prosecutor or a judge.** Some Christians seem more eager to play one of those roles when it comes to non-Christians or unchurched people. The verdict is not up to us. It's the Holy Spirit who enables conviction and conversion, faith and following. Most people are loved into a relationship with Jesus, not argued or shamed into a relationship with Jesus, and love often begins with an invitation.

How will you feel when you get to heaven, and you're welcomed by all the people whose lives you touched and who you invited into your life and to Jesus? **Live your faith and share your life.**

Prayer: “Lord, open my eyes and ears today to a person who needs to know you, And give me your words to say. Lord, show me what you want to do through me to build relationships, transform lives, and change my community.”

Questions for Discussion or Reflection

1. Recall an experience when someone invited you to something that you really enjoyed which blessed or touched your life? Who invited you? Where did you go or what did you experience together?
2. Recall an experience when you invited someone else to something that you really enjoyed which blessed or touched your life? Who did you invite? Where did you go or what did you experience together?
3. How does it make you feel when you know others are invited to an event, but you weren't? How does that feeling impact your decisions about being inviting to others?
4. Which of the invitations from the Bible that were shared in the sermon means the most to you today at this season in your life? Why?
5. Can you identify anyone in your life who invited you and encouraged you to see and learn more about Jesus as Andrew did with Simon? Who were they and what did they do that was helpful for you? What can you imitate from their example?
6. Who are you actively praying for and building a relationship with who doesn't know Christ in a personal way who you can be inviting to worship and other church related events to help them meet Jesus? Identify three people and begin praying for them daily.