

“COME AND SEE”

Sunday, January 22, 2017

Text: John 1:43-51. [Isaiah 26:1-5, especially 4; Titus 3:3-8]

Subject: Becoming a trustworthy disciple.

Desired Response: Let's examine our lives and discard behaviors that violate people's trust.

How To: Hold up the mirror of Scripture and see if our behaviors honor Christ and others.

How Long: Starting today and proceeding continually thereafter.

Sermon in a Sentence: “If we want to serve as effective ambassadors of God's mercy, grace, and love, we must first live in such a way that we earn the trust of those who cross the pathway of our lives.”

Worship Theme: “God longs to make us trustworthy, so that we can effectively communicate His message of love, forgiveness, and holiness to the world.”

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I confess to you that I became very concerned when I learned my assignment from the Lectionary that Bob LeSuer so graciously created deals with the subject of “trust.” In fact, I was a little shocked.

Some people are naturally trusting. They enter every relationship with a positive attitude and always look for the very best possible outcome. It doesn't ever occur to them that the persons with whom they have developed relationships might, at some point, prove untrustworthy. Frankly, I envy these open, accepting, and positive-attitude people.

Then, there are people like me. Because of my personal history, dating way back to childhood experiences, and because I am inherently and extremely shy, for all of my adult life I have approached every relationship with suspicion. I expect any new person who crosses my pathway to eventually betray me. It is quite likely that my generally negative attitude toward trust has proven so off-putting to many people that it has created a self-fulfilling prophecy, time after time.

Nevertheless, I have decided to put aside my own pre-dispositions and prejudices and see if I could share with you the importance of trust.

In light of that, let me explain that my “Subject” for today is “Becoming a trustworthy disciple.” If we are going to share what God has done, is doing, and will do in our lives with other people, we have to be viewed by those other people as individuals who are worthy of trust. Remember from last week’s sermon, Lisa Gordon shared the “Five Thresholds” of this sermon series on evangelism, as people cross from...

- Distrust to trust
- Apathetic to curious
- Closed to open
- Meandering to seeking
- Lost to saved

So, the “Subject” of my sermon today obviously addresses the first of these “Five Thresholds”: moving from distrust to trust.

The Prophet Isaiah has made this statement in Isaiah 26:4:

Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord, the Lord himself, is the Rock eternal.

In our relationship with God, we must learn to trust Him implicitly and continually. He will never betray our trust. He will never let us down. He will always surround us with His loving care. We can count on Him in every situation.

If we are to become trustworthy, with God’s trustworthiness as our example, where do we begin? To answer that question, I want to direct our attention to the Scripture passage for today, found in John 1:43-51. If you have access to a Bible, I would invite you to turn to this passage. I think it helps if you follow along while I read. Again, I’m reading from John 1:43-51.

⁴³ *The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, “Follow me.”*

⁴⁴ *Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida.* ⁴⁵ *Philip found Nathanael and told him, “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.”*

⁴⁶ *“Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?” Nathanael asked.*

“Come and see,” said Philip.

⁴⁷ *When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, “Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.”*

⁴⁸ *“How do you know me?” Nathanael asked.*

Jesus answered, “I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you.”

⁴⁹ *Then Nathanael declared, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel.”*

⁵⁰ *Jesus said, “You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You will see greater things than that.”⁵¹ He then added, “Very truly I tell you, you will see ‘heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on’ the Son of Man.”*

Now, since we’re dealing with Philip, and since we’re told he was from Bethsaida, it is reasonable for you to wonder where in the world Bethsaida is located. If you imagine for a moment that the Sea of Galilee, or Lake of Gennesaret, or Lake of Tiberias, is shaped somewhat like the continent of Africa, or like an upside down pear. Then, Bethsaida is located on the Sea of Galilee approximately where Morocco is located in Africa. That is, in about the eleven o’clock position on the dial of a watch or clock—on the northwestern shore of the Sea, just about six miles south of Capernaum. Bethsaida is about 90 miles north from Jerusalem, or about 4 1/2 days of walking at a speed of 20 miles per day.

Jesus was raised in Nazareth of Galilee. Nazareth is about 20 miles southwest of Bethsaida, as the crow flies, or about a day’s journey. As a Galilean, Jesus was quite familiar with this area around the western shore of the Sea of Galilee. It was close enough to His hometown that He would have been able to visit there occasionally.

In the verses immediately preceding our text for today, Jesus is baptized in the Jordan River at Bethany, about one and a half miles east of Jerusalem. There, John the Baptist also introduces Jesus to at least two, and likely more, of John’s disciples: Andrew, brother of Simon Peter, and an unnamed disciple who we realize from later context is John, the son of Zebedee and brother of James.

In our Scripture passage for this morning, the next day Jesus sets out for Galilee and invites Philip to accompany him. Upon their arrival in Galilee, Philip connects with his friend Nathanael. Notice the conversation that begins in verse 45. Philip says:

“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.”

⁴⁶ *“Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?” Nathanael asked.*

“Come and see,” said Philip.

I hope you can tell from this exchange that Nathanael was not particularly predisposed to meet with someone from Nazareth, believing that such a person would likely have no value whatsoever. If you think about the town or city where you grew up, was their some other place, relatively nearby, that people considered even less desirable than your own neighborhood?

I grew up in a very modest household, located in a neighborhood of well-maintained, clean little houses on East Main Street in the small city of Bradford, Pennsylvania—about 100 miles east of Erie. Our busy street had

a constant flow of traffic, including truck traffic, that passed noisily by our house every hour of every day. There were some neighborhoods in our small city that suffered from what today we call “urban blight.” The houses were not well-maintained. The yards were filled with junk. The habitants were very, very poor. And, it was common for me to hear other people speaking about such places with some distaste.

That’s what’s happening with Nathanael. Nazareth, the little town where Jesus grew up as the son of a carpenter, was a dusty, dirty little hole of a town. The people were honorable, kind, and industrious. But, the appearance of the town led people who lived nearby to think of Nazareth as a place from which no one wanted to hail.

Left to his own choice, Nathanael would never go see someone who came from Nazareth. He would feel they just wouldn’t be worth his time.

Yet, when invited by Philip to see this Jesus, a man who had so gripped Philip’s mind and heart, Nathanael went. Why did he do that? Simply because Nathanael trusted Philip. Over the time of their relationship, Philip had earned Nathanael’s trust.

You see, one of the first elements of successful evangelism—and the first of our “Five Thresholds”—is the building of trust. You cannot hope to earn the opportunity to share the message of God’s eternal love through His Son, Jesus, if you do not first build a relationship in such a way that you earn the trust of the one with whom you wish to share.

In a sentence what I’m suggesting goes like this: *“If we want to serve as effective ambassadors of God’s mercy, grace, and love, we must first live in such a way that we earn the trust of those who cross the pathway of our lives.”*

Our response to the lesson we learn from this passage of Scripture at the end of the first chapter of the Gospel of John is to examine our lives and discard behavior that violates people’s trust. So, let’s examine some of the behaviors that can potentially define our lives in a way that might impact on the building of trust. These are things that have become a part of who we are that might put up barriers to people actually trusting us.

There are many such items we could put on a list, but purely for purposes of illustration, I have chosen this morning to speak of just three of them:

1. Do we always speak well of others? The way we talk about other people will often cause someone to conclude that we must talk about them that way when they’re not around. Most of us have people that we just don’t like. We may have convinced ourselves that we have very good reasons why we feel the

way we do. But, is it really necessary that we share how we feel with others? Wouldn't it be better that we learn how to speak well of people, or, at least, remain silent when their names come up in conversation? Speaking well of others is a mark of both maturity and stability. Speaking well of others tends to build trust.

2. Do we live our lives with a consistency? In other words, when we say we're going to do something, do we do it? Or, do we make promises that we simply do not keep. And, how about the actual things we do? Do we have habits or behaviors that send a message counter to what non-Christian people may use to define how Christians should act or live.

Looking at a whole wide range of behaviors in our lives, I ask this question: “How often do we ever consider the way we behave in light of the message it sends to the very people with whom we want to share the love of Christ?” Do we consistently act or behave in a way that Scripture teaches us we ought to act? Do we live in a way that always—always—honors our Lord Jesus Christ?

Do we drive so fast that we make other drivers angry? Do our Facebook posts, or Twitter tweets, or Instagram photos, or Pinterest pins, or Snap Chat conversations reflect the kind of grace that God expects us to have?

If we were to watch a video of our behaviors throughout any given day, what might we discover about the messages our behaviors send to the people who cross our pathway. And, as we study Scripture and God prompts us to consider our pet behaviors, should we not measure them against the way Christ might behave?

3. Does God-breathed love mark our lives? Or, do our rants about politics (or any other subject) on Twitter or Facebook have such a cutting edge that we are emulating the worst and nastiest posts of others? Do we approach other people with a smugness that makes them wonder who we think we are? Do we treat the people who serve us in stores or restaurants the same way we would treat our good friends? Or, do we act in selfish and demanding ways, especially when we're in a hurry or feel we're not being well served?

You see, dear ones, this list of behaviors can prove endless. I’ve just chosen to name three “How-Tos” for our consideration in the time available this morning: Do we always speak well of others? Do we live our lives with consistency? Does God-breathed love mark our lives?

Remember, I’m suggesting: *“If we want to serve as effective ambassadors of God’s mercy, grace, and love, we must first live in such a way that we earn the trust of those who cross the pathway of our lives.”*

One way to do that—to earn the trust of others—is to examine our lives against Scripture and discard behaviors that violate people’s trust.

Philip had obviously built trust with Nathanael. Then, when he met Jesus, Nathanael saw an example of who Jesus was when Jesus told him... Well, here’s the rest of our Scripture for today:

⁴⁷ When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, “Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.”

⁴⁸ “How do you know me?” Nathanael asked.

Jesus answered, “I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you.”

⁴⁹ Then Nathanael declared, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel.”

⁵⁰ Jesus said, “You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You will see greater things than that.”⁵¹ He then added, “Very truly I tell you, you will see ‘heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on’ the Son of Man.”

In one miraculous act, Jesus built an instant trust with Nathanael. It would be nice if we could do that. But, we can’t—because while we represent Jesus, we aren’t Jesus. We don’t have miraculous power in the same way that He did and does.

Yet, we can live and act in such a way that we, day-by-day, moment-by-moment, encounter-by-encounter, build trust with the people whom God brings across the pathway of our lives. We do this by being “real.” We do this by being “genuine.” We do this by making certain that the reality of our lives includes only those behaviors that honor God and show good will toward other people.

And, that’s all that I have to say to you today. A lesson from the Gospel of John, Chapter 1, verses 43 through 51.

My “Subject”: *“Becoming a trustworthy disciple.”*

My “Desired Response”: *“Let’s examine our lives and discard behaviors that violate people’s trust.”*

My “How Tos”: “Hold up the mirror of Scripture and see if our behaviors honor Christ and others.” And, I chose just three How-To examples: “Do we always speak well of others?” “Do we live our lives with consistency?” “Does God-breathed love mark our lives?”

“How Long” will this process take before it impacts our spiritual formation? If we begin today and keep on continually, we will see results very soon.

And, my “Sermon in a Sentence”: *“If we want to serve as effective ambassadors of God’s mercy, grace, and love, we must first live in such a way that we earn the trust of those who cross the pathway of our lives.”*

May God enable us to do this to bring honor, glory, majesty, and power to His precious and holy name.
Amen.