

Suttons Bay Congregational Church
John 1:29-42 *Revealing*

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Never one to be at the forefront of technology, I didn't start listening to podcasts until about a year ago. Since figuring out how to subscribe to them, I now listen to podcasts when I'm driving and when I'm walking and when I'm mowing and when I'm shoveling. And because here in Northern Michigan there's not much of a lag time between when we stop mowing and when we start shoveling, this year I think it was about four days, I spend a lot of time listening to podcasts.

A podcast to which I've just recently subscribed is called *Reveal*. According to their website *Reveal* "engages and empowers the public through investigative journalism and groundbreaking storytelling that sparks action, improves lives and protects our democracy . . . We consistently shine a bright light on injustice and protect the most vulnerable in our society."¹

In the most recent podcast I listened to entitled "The Lost Homes of Detroit," the program's journalists shared stories from home owners living in neighborhoods with a high percentage of abandoned properties. They interviewed folks whose home values had decreased significantly over the years and yet the city hadn't reassessed those values for the purposes of determining property taxes. For years the homeowners had paid far more in taxes than they should have due to the city's negligence. Because of the work done to find out the truth by the team at *Reveal*, at least one home owner was able to keep her home and afford to pay her property taxes.

And that's why I listen to *Reveal*—every episode tells stories that reveal truth and that truth transforms someone's life for the better. As Dr. King said when he accepted the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964, "I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word in reality." Hearing the truth that is revealed in the stories investigated by *Reveal*, lifts my spirits and gives me hope.

Studying scripture is the same way for me. Hearing these stories of people's lives getting transformed for the better because Truth with a capital "T" is revealed lifts my spirits and gives me hope. Indeed in the Book of John, each episode in the gospel sheds light on the life of Jesus. Each story reveals a new truth about who Jesus was. The stories build upon each other, further revealing truths about Jesus and the transforming impact he has on the people he encounters.

This morning we'll consider four stories from John's gospel. I know it's a lot and the most points any sermon is supposed to have is three but you all are exceptional and I know you can handle four. That being said, each story is worthy of a sermon series in and of itself but I think there's also value in looking at a sequence of them back to back to create a different kind impact than studying each story in greater detail.

We'll start with our story from this morning from the first chapter of John's gospel. In the story of Jesus calling the first disciples Jesus reveals the truth that he invites others to follow him, that he wants people to come and see. What a fitting way to introduce the stories that are to follow—come and see. I appreciate the way this invitation is explained by David Lose who is a Lutheran pastor in Minneapolis.

Come and see. These are the words we're invited to say to others who are seeking something more from life.

Take note here -- this is about invitation. It's not about cramming your faith down someone else's throat. After all, nowhere in the Bible does it tell us to say, "Have you given your life to Christ?" Or, worse:

¹ <https://www.revealnews.org/about-us/>

"Do you know where you will spend eternity?" Or, maybe rock bottom: "God loves you and wants a relationship with you...but if you turn away God will send you to hell."

No. We're just invited to say -- not to push, just to say -- "Come and see." Why? Because this news is so good it's hard not to share, especially with the people we care about. And if they aren't interested, or dismiss what we're saying, or make some smart aleck response, that's okay. It's not our job to convert, just to invite.²

I love the truth revealed in this story—Jesus didn't preach to his first disciples, he didn't pressure them to join him, he didn't make them recite a creed or check their references. He just invited them to come and see and all we really need to do is invite others to do the same.

And for those who accepted his invitation, what a thing it was that they would soon come and see in the next chapter of John's gospel—the wedding in Canaan; Jesus turning water into wine. If you want to see it for yourself, it's right there on page 751, the facing page to the story of the first disciples. The story of Jesus at the wedding in Canaan is probably one of the better known stories in scripture—a host of a wedding party runs out of wine and Jesus performs his first public miracle by transforming barrels of water into barrels of wine and it's not even like he makes a bunch of Franzia but rather he transforms the mundane into the finest of wines. This miracle isn't some kind of party trick meant to impress the party guests. Rather, in John's gospel, "Jesus' miracles are 'signs' that reveal the salvation, abundance, and new life now present in the world through Jesus, revealing Jesus' glory as God's Son through whom salvation enters the world. According to John's Gospel, the proper response to such revelation is belief, as the disciples demonstrate here.³ This is a story of the disciples moving from curiosity about Jesus to belief in Jesus as, right before their very eyes, the Truth that he has the power to perform miracles is revealed.

Speaking of curiosity, let's move on to the story of the encounter between Nicodemus and Jesus found in chapter three of John's gospel, right there on the same page as the wedding story. Nicodemus is curious about Jesus and comes to him under the cover of darkness. We're not sure why this story happens in the dark, an interesting possible answer to the question is that it would have been a risk to Nicodemus' reputation to be seen talking with that rabble-rousing-rabbi Jesus of Nazareth. And yet, Nicodemus wants to come and see more about the story of Jesus. Nicodemus approaches him asking, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him." Jesus responds, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again." "How can someone be born when they are old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!"

⁵ Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. ⁶ "How can this be?" Nicodemus asked. Jesus in turn wonders how it is that Nicodemus can't figure out how it is. "You are Israel's teacher," said Jesus, "and do you not understand these things? . . . "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him." (John 3:16-17)

Jesus came to save, to redeem, to transform—not to judge, to condemn, and to damn. Jesus came to reveal the truth that God loves us so much that God came to us, Immanuel, God with us, in Jesus of Nazareth who teaches the way of forgiveness and mercy, not judgment and condemnation. Our lives and our world ache for the transformation that comes from forgiveness and mercy because Lord knows all of the judgment and condemnation is getting us nowhere fast. The truth Jesus reveals in this story is that he came that we would

² <https://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=1497>

³ https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1917

have life and have it abundantly, that we would drink of the living water that brings us new life and the life everlasting which brings us to our final story of four this morning, it's on the next page if you're following along in the text.

It's a familiar story to anyone who was able to be here last week, we're considering it again this week because it is a story that reveals so much, the story of woman who was willing to "come and see." The Woman at the Well; she's a Samaritan and a woman. Jesus is also at the well; he's a Jew and a man. Samaritans and Jews did not intermingle, men and women avoided direct contact in public settings. The chance that the Samaritan woman and Jesus would interact, let alone have a rather intimate and intense encounter, is revealing in and of itself. It reveals that Jesus was willing to cross cultural and religious boundaries in order to bring new life and the life everlasting to a woman who was thirsty for it, thirsty enough to "come and see" a Jewish man at the well. Talk about a story to lift our spirits and bring us hope.

This is why I love scripture—when read in sequence it's like one of my story-telling podcasts, each story is different and yet each is the same in that it sheds light on the truth and transforms lives. Surely this is what the author of John's gospel does with this series of revealing stories about Jesus—these stories invite us, over and over again, each in a slightly different way, to "come and see" the transforming power of Christ, to come and have our spirits lifted by these hope giving stories of Jesus. To come and see that, like the first disciples, we, too, are invited to follow Jesus and be a part of the greatest story ever told. To come and see, like the guests at the wedding in Canaan, that Jesus performs miracles because he truly is the Son of God and provides not just wine, but also life, in abundance. To come and see, along with Nicodemus, that Jesus comes into our lives and comes into our world, not to condemn us but to save us. To come and see that no matter who we are or what we've done, no matter the labels or judgments the world attaches to us, Jesus invites us not just to come and see, but, as he did with the Woman at the Well, to drink of the living waters of new life and the life everlasting.

Jesus invites us into his story, Jesus invites us to come and see, week after week, month after month, year after year, to come and see together what it is to know the stories of Jesus and follow in the Way of Christ. Come and see. Come and see, indeed.