

“The Compelling Invitation” | John 1:35-43

- Read John 1:35-43

I would like to introduce you to Henry. Well, when I knew him children did not call adults by their first names, so let me introduce him to you as I knew him: Rev. Houseman. He was my pastor when I was a preteen, and shaped my life as a Christian more than any other pastor.

Rev. Houseman taught me about Christian love. Certainly he talked about it in his sermons, but more importantly he demonstrated it in his life. He seemed to have time for everyone, and never did I hear him say an unkind thing about another person. He treated everyone as if they were the most important person in his life – from children to senior adults. And he was always on his knees praying for us.

It was Rev. Houseman who God used to plant a seed in the heart of a young boy and suggest that just maybe God would call him to be a pastor. He gave that boy a Bible and said, read it, for this is what will get you safely through life. And Rev. Houseman encouraged that boy in everything he did, even when, thirty years later, that boy became the pastor of Rev. Houseman.

I remember Rev. Houseman telling us about how he came to be a pastor. He was in the war, WWII, and he was in a terrible situation. The battle was fierce and the enemy was pressing in all around him. Many of the soldiers in his squadron were killed or injured, and he was deathly afraid. In that moment the farm boy from Saskatchewan vowed that if God got him out of this he would give his life as a pastor. Well, God got him safely home, and so Rev. Houseman, good to his word, went to Bible School and became a pastor.

God’s rescue was a work of grace.

Henry, the young man on the battlefield, did not deserve to be rescued by God. He had not earned the right to be rescued, even in his promise to follow the call to be a pastor. No, God’s rescue was grace. **Henry received something he did not earn or deserve.** God simply stepped in and brought good to his life, rescuing him, giving him a chance to live his life as a follower of Christ. In that rescue was an invitation to come, follow me. It was a gift of love. Maybe this is why the one word that characterized the rest of Henry’s life, Rev. Houseman’s life, was love.

From that day forward Rev. Houseman was on a journey, a journey with Jesus. It was on that journey that he learned to love as Christ did, and to be an encourager, and to live with an optimism that God could fix anyone! He believed it because he saw how God had rescued him. And countless lives were changed for eternity through the loving ministry of this gentle man.

This morning it is important that we understand that **we are all called to journey with Jesus.** Some people talk like becoming a Christian is a one time event, like graduation from High School, and once it is done you need not think about it again. That is a false view of what it means to be a Christian. It really is a journey, one in which we learn and grow and mature as we move along, but a journey that is lead by Jesus as he takes us to the home he has prepared for us.

In our passage this morning we read of the calling of Jesus' first disciples. A disciple was like a student in a class, and Jesus was the teacher. This is why they called Jesus, "Rabbi," which means teacher.

But Jesus was not a teacher who taught a class at the local university, where the students could find him in the lecture hall every day teaching them Bible 101 or Theology 101. Jesus was what we call an itinerant preacher. He moved from town to town, teaching and preaching to whomever would listen. But for those who really wanted to learn from him, who wanted to be his disciple, they would **not wait** until he came to their town again to get their next lesson. No, they followed Jesus wherever he went and soaked in all he had to say. More importantly they watched him demonstrate the very things he taught about God's love and salvation.

We read in the Gospels how for three years twelve men followed Jesus as his disciples. They walked throughout the region of Galilee, rode on boats with Jesus across the Sea of Galilee, and journeyed to Jerusalem at least one time a year to celebrate the Jewish feasts there.

But the journey of a disciple must have a starting place. And that starting place is an invitation from Jesus.

In our passage this morning two disciples of John – John the Baptizer – saw Jesus and were curious about him. Twice they had heard John call Jesus "the Lamb of God." That curious title was applied to no one else. They saw the respect and awe that John had for Jesus, so the next time they saw Jesus they followed him, to see what he would do, where he would go, who he really was.

As they followed Jesus, he turned and asked them what they wanted. Maybe caught off guard they blurted out, "Where are you staying?" I am sure they had a million questions they wanted to ask Jesus, but that is the one that came out, "Where are you staying?"

But notice Jesus' gracious response: "Come and see."

Here is the invitation to come and follow him. The journey of grace always begins with an invitation: "Come." God does not force anyone to come to him, but He invites everyone. We, the sinful ones, are invited by a Holy God to come join him on a journey.

We are told that Jesus took them to where he was staying that night and spent the rest of the day talking with them. Wouldn't you have loved to be in that class?

However, being curious about Jesus did not make a person his disciple. Many of you have heard the story of Lee Strobel, the New York Times columnist who set out to disprove the resurrection of Jesus, knowing that if he did that the whole Christian faith would fall apart. His wife had become a Christian and so he wanted to prove to her that this religion was a hoax.

Lee Strobel went to great lengths to disprove the resurrection, and in the process came to know a great deal about Jesus. He discovered that there is no historical figure that has more material to prove his existence than Jesus. He learned that Jesus was crucified and without a shadow of doubt had died on that cross. And he eventually had to conclude that the resurrection was true.

All that information about Jesus, but Lee Strobel was not a Christian, a disciple of Jesus yet. He had heard Jesus say, "Come and see" but he needed to take another step.

In our text we find the next step in verse 43 when Jesus says to Philip, "Follow me." The journey of grace always will bring us to the point of decision, where "Come and see" is replaced by "Follow me."

They sound similar, but they are very different. "Come and see" is getting closer, becoming acquainted with the journey, the period of time when someone is evaluating if the journey is for them.

I remember the first time I hiked the West Coast Trail. I spent days reading material about the trail, what to bring, what to expect, how to deal with cougars and bears. I listened to others who had hiked the trail tell their stories. This was a "Come and see" period for me.

Then I had to decide: would I actually hike the trail? Would I take the journey?

This is what Jesus was asking those who wanted to follow him: Will you follow me?

Now Jesus makes it clear to his disciples that following him comes at a cost. Those first disciples soon learned that for them the cost started with leaving their homes and families behind for a time so Jesus could prepare them for the mission.

Some would leave lucrative jobs, like Levi the tax collector, to live in poverty.

Some would leave the safety of a family business to be dependent on the generosity of others, and the provisions of God.

Some would leave the security of power and might, like Simon the Zealot, the warrior, to learn to be meek and humble, and powerless outside of God.

In fact, the journey of grace will cost the disciple of Jesus everything – "take up your cross and follow me," Jesus said. It is about dying to self so Christ can live in you.

There is a cost to follow Jesus, but there is also great gain!

The greatest benefit is knowing your sins are forgiven and you have a right relationship with God. This new life of forgiveness and mercy is grace.

And here is a wonderful truth: God's grace is there to help us make the decision to follow Jesus. We do not know what lies ahead, whether life will be hard or easy, if we will endure sickness or loss, or if we will see peace or war. What we do know is the promise of Jesus to never leave us or forsake us. That is his grace.

Yes, the journey of grace calls for a decision: are we in or not? We cannot be partially in. As Jesus says in the book of Revelations: "I wish that you were hot or cold. But since you are lukewarm – neither in nor out – I will spew you out of my mouth." (Revelations 3:16)

Do you remember the day you said "yes" to Jesus? When you said you wanted to be on that journey of grace? You probably called it "Being saved" for it was the day you confessed before God that you were a sinner, and asked for his forgiveness, and asked him to come into your life so you could live a new life that honoured him. You were born again, saved, converted. You were saying "yes" to Jesus' invitation to "Come, follow me."

And from that day forward your life could not be the same.

The journey of grace is a journey of transformation. Jesus truly does love us just as we are. Grace says there is nothing you can do to make him love you more, and neither is there anything you could do that would stop him from loving you. That is amazing grace!

But there is another side of that. When we come to Jesus we come as sinners, stained by the things of this world. We think like the world, act like the world, react like the world. Our priorities and values are shaped by the world. Jesus sees that, and his grace reaches down to us and starts to transform us. What will we look like when he is done? We will look like Jesus. True, it will be but a poor reflection, but we will look more like Jesus than we do the world.

As it has often been said, “God loves us just as we are, but loves us too much to let us stay as we are. He has much better plans for us...”

We see that even in the calling of the disciples.

Jesus says, “Come and see.” Then he says, “Follow me.” Finally, he says, “you will be.”

In Matthew’s account of the calling of the disciples, Jesus says to Peter and Andrew, “Follow me and you will be fishers of men.” (Matthew 4:19)

The journey of grace is Jesus at work in our lives through the Holy Spirit so we will be his people. Therefore we will follow his design for our lives, our families, our businesses, our communities.

We will be his children, and we want the family resemblance to be there – we are people of love. Rev. Houseman was not likely always the gracious, loving man I knew. This was the evidence of the work of the Holy Spirit in his life. “You will be...” known by your love, Jesus told his disciples in John 13:35.

When Jesus told Peter and Andrew they would be fishers of men he was not saying “just them.” We all have the same call to go and tell others about Jesus so they also may join in the journey of grace. We are commissioned to go and do likewise.

That will not look the same for everyone. Rick and Donna witness to the people at the gym. Richard and Svetlana witness to the people in their business. John and Cathy witness to their neighbourhood. The youth and children witness to their friends. We all hope to witness to our families. Some love the least of these and through that get a chance to share their story about Jesus. Some actually knock on doors or talk to strangers and tell them of Jesus. Some witness to their neighbours through their faithful attendance of church. And on it goes...

Earlier I described being in the “come and see” phase as I evaluated walking the West Coast Trail. I made the decision and made the hike. I am so glad I did. I saw things and experienced things you can only see and experience on the trail. It was worth it. And when I said yes to Jesus’ invitation to follow him as a boy, I started a journey that has shown me wonderful things.

This morning you are invited once again to be part of the journey of grace. Where are you on that journey?

“Come and see?” – just curious? Jesus invites you to take the next step: “Follow me” – have you said yes to Jesus’ invitation. “You will be” – is your life being shaped to look more and more like Jesus? The invitation is to come with Jesus on this journey of grace. You will never regret it.