

John 1:35-51

“Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?” Thomas Salter in his commentary on this passage on Working Preacher explains: ‘Nazareth sat in the heart of Galilee, a region populated by Jews and Gentiles from several ethnicities. Positively, it could be said that it was a diverse region. The Jewish communities, at most, constituted about 60 percent of the Galilean populace. Jewish persons in Judea looked down on their kinsmen in Galilee. Judea was over 90 percent Jewish. Those in Judea paid the temple tax, kept the rituals more rigorously, and were less likely to intermarry. On the other hand, Galilean Jews were less likely to pay the temple tax, more lax in regard to ritualistic traditions, and more likely to intermarry. Their Judean cousins saw Galilean Jews as less pure, if not impure.’<sup>1</sup>

Can anything good come from there? This question constitutes one we often ask. When I lived in Lodz, we asked – can anything good come from Warsaw? When I lived in Edinburgh, the question was: can anything good come from Glasgow? When I moved to Aberdeen, we asked whether anything good can come from the Torry area. Orcadians wonder whether anything good can come from south, British wonder that about Europe, Americans think that of Mexico, Israelites wonder whether anything good can come from Palestine. Can anything good come from there?

We often say that of people we do not know. Two stories to illustrate it. When I still lived in Amsterdam, I went to visit my friends – he was Dutch, his wife was Brazilian. He suddenly remarked: All those foreigners coming to this country! She was quick to say: And all those Dutch people marrying those foreigners! Only then did he realise what he did. The thing is that he knew us and loved us for who we were so he never considered us to be ‘foreigners’ like those other ones. We were Julia and Cristina, not foreigners to him.

The other story you might recognise yourselves. When I moved here for the first time, I was convinced it was to be for a few months and then I’d go somewhere else. Nothing wrong with Orkney as such but who on earth would want to move away from civilisation for longer? I was a city girl and that was that. A city girl I would remain.

Then of course I actually came here and fell in love with the place and its people. I now wanted to stay. I started inviting people to come and stay with me and see for themselves what a magnificent place Orkney was. I wanted them to come and see the nature, the views, the landscapes, the forever changing colours of sea and sky. I wanted them to experience the music, the opportunities, the facilities, the archaeology. Many did and many fell in love with Orkney too. There is one in particular though that I can think of who not only never came but she knows there’s nothing to do or see here either. Whenever we speak, she says to me: ‘Whatever do you do there? There’s nothing to do!’ She always marvels at any facilities I mention: do you have a cinema? A hospital?? An airport??? All my explanations that our supermarkets have the same toothpaste, cheese and clothes that she’s got, all my photos of everything here mean nothing – she needs to come and see for herself. Will she ever? I don’t know.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.workingpreacher.org/?lect\\_date=01/06/2018&lectionary=nl](https://www.workingpreacher.org/?lect_date=01/06/2018&lectionary=nl).

Nathanael was similarly unimpressed when he heard Jesus was from Nazareth. What good can come from there? But the difference between him and the person I just mentioned is that he actually decided to go and see for himself what that Jesus was like. And after just a brief exchange Nathanael was hooked: 'Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel.'

I don't know how many of you are aware that most people who come to church for the first time do so because they've been invited. Not because they suddenly feel the longing to go, not because of the building, choir or the new car park but because someone has invited them to come and see for themselves. I asked you to share what your favourite thing about this faith community is. Some of the answers were community and the facilities that enable that community to thrive.

It's a good exercise to stop and think what our favourite thing about the church is. Because if we don't like anything about being here or can't think of a reason why we come, why ever would we invite anyone to join in with us? Sense of duty wouldn't do it. What is it that draws you? Would it draw others too?

When was the last time you invited anyone to church? The future of the Church is in the hands of ordinary Christians inviting their ordinary neighbours, friends and family to come and see for themselves. The future of the Church is in your hands – to a degree at least 😊

When speaking about the invitation to come and see I cannot not speak of Israel and Palestine. Palestinian Christians, along with the World Council of Churches and the Alternative Tourism Group, have been calling on Christians planning a pilgrimage to the Holy Land to live out their faith as they do so. They've been calling on Christians not to shy away from the difficult but instead to come and see the reality of the occupation on the ground. We are encouraged to go and see for ourselves and then to come back home and tell others what we have seen. Why? Because seeing it on the telly is one thing but actually going there, seeing beyond what the media tell us and meeting the people trapped in this impossible situation is quite another. My heart has been captured by what I've seen – the injustice, the helplessness but also the commitment to peace and non-violent resistance. It's been an inspiration to me in ways I never considered possible before actually going there myself.

When we analyse the conversation Jesus had with the two disciples of John, we wonder how on earth they got on so well as the start was rather awkward. They start following Jesus and he says abruptly: What do you want? Not a very inviting comment, I must say. They then even more awkwardly say they just wondered where he stayed. He then says: Come and see. And so they do.

The invitation to come and see is not something we expect. The disciples asked: 'where are you staying?' Jesus said: Come and see. Nathanael asked: Can anything good come from Nazareth? Philip replied: Come and see. It's not an answer that gives any information. It rather provokes curiosity.

This invitation is then deeper than we might at first think. It's an invitation to relationship, community and fellowship. When Jesus said to the two disciples: Come and see, he didn't invite them on a simple tour of the premises. He invited them to a deeper relationship with himself which they did enter into. Simon Peter and Nathanael did exactly the same. I like the fact that by the end of today's passage Jesus has four followers – but he still hasn't done a thing! He hasn't started doing anything! The invitation to come and see did the trick. Jesus himself is the ultimate attraction.

And yes, there's always the chance that the offer will be rejected but it shouldn't stop us from offering in the first place.

So come and see. Taste and see that the Lord is good. And then extend the invitation to others. For God's glory. Amen.