

Title: Finding Life
Text: John 1:35-42
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Immanuel Baptist Church
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John Ortburg tells about a friend of the family named Eileen who became upset when her daughter told her that someone had been talking to her about God. Eileen wanted nothing to do with God and she didn't want her daughter to have anything to do with God. Well, that night Eileen couldn't sleep. At midnight she went downstairs and for some reason picked up a Bible. She couldn't remember the last time she had been to a church; nor had she ever opened a Bible on her own. When she opened it she noticed it was divided into an "old" part and a "new" part, so she decided to start with the "new" part, figuring it had been updated.

So in the still of the night she sat on her living room floor and began to read the gospel of Matthew. By 3 a.m. she was in the middle of John's gospel and discovered, as she describes it, that she had fallen in love with the person of Jesus. She said a prayer for the first time in her life. She said, "God, I don't know what I am doing, but I know you are what I want." She didn't know how to pray, but she knew that she wanted to know the God who had come to this world in the person of Jesus.

The writer of the Gospel of John wants all of his readers to come to faith, to know the God who has revealed God's self in the person of Jesus. At the end of this Gospel the writer tells us that the "signs" he wrote about in his account were written so that the reader would believe—trust in Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God—and that by trusting in Jesus the believer would find life in his name.

In this Gospel "life" means spiritual life, life in relationship with God. This Gospel is certain that all people can find "life"—life in relationship with God—through trust in and obedience to Jesus Christ.

In John words have double meanings. The invitation extended by Jesus to the two disciples of John the Baptist, when they ask where he is staying, means more than simply, "Come and see where I live." When Jesus says—"Come and see"—that is an invitation to anyone reading this Gospel to "see" on a deeper level, to see spiritually, to see that in Jesus we can find fullness of life in relationship with God.

John Ortburg's friend found her way into a relationship with God by reading the Gospels and in her words "falling in love with the person of Jesus." There are other ways into a relationship with God. There is no one set way for all people. It could be that through your

witness, through your life and actions and words that someone might find their way into a relationship with God.

In our text when Andrew discovered that Jesus was the Messiah he went out and found his brother Simon and brought him to Jesus, so that he could discover for himself the reality of God's grace and truth in Jesus.

Maybe there is someone here today and you need and long for a new kind of life, a life in relationship with God and in cooperation with God's purpose and plan to bring justice and peace to the earth. Or maybe, you have had a history with God, but you need a new beginning, or new way of "seeing," a new way of believing in and knowing God because the faith of your childhood is no longer sufficient. Christ is saying to you, "Come and see." Come to me just as you are and learn to see in new, fresh ways.

Let me share some good news with you. You may think that you are seeking God, but actually it is God seeking you.

Robert Fulghum in his book, *All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten* tells about playing hide and seek in his neighborhood growing up. There was one kid that always hid too good. After a while they would give up trying to find him. Later, after they had quit the game the kid would show up and he would be upset with them.

Fulghum writes, "There's hiding and there's finding, we'd say. And he'd say it was hide and seek not hide and give up, and we'd all yell about who made the rules and who cared about who, anyway, and how we wouldn't play with him anymore if he didn't get it straight and who needed him anyhow, and things like that." It didn't matter, says Fulghum. The next time they would play hide and seek he would once again hide too good.

You know, brothers and sisters, it's possible to hide too good. God doesn't force God's way into our lives. God doesn't overpower us or coerce us to "Come and see." But God comes looking for us and the good news is that God doesn't give up. God doesn't quit the game. This, I believe, is what makes God so unique; God's love is unconditional, and so God doesn't give up on us. That means that God is looking for you, right now.

Did you ever say the prayer when you were a child: God is great and God is good and we thank you for our food? The line about God in that simple prayer is great theology. God is great—which means that God is huge, big, immense. God is greater than our thoughts, ideas, beliefs, and our imagination. Most of our attempts at Christian doctrine impugn the greatness of God by making the great God into a little god. There would be nothing wrong with our creeds, confessions, and doctrinal statements if they represented what we believe at a given time. The problem is that we turn them into absolutes and tell God how God has

to act and be. We use them to define God and hence confine God. And once we confine God to our little box and domesticate God, then we can control God and use God to further our own agenda. The living God, however, cannot be confined to what we believe about God; God is much greater.

God is great, and God is also good. God in God's greatness has the capacity to know us intimately and be with us through the mundane affairs of everyday life. God in God's goodness assures us that God does what God has the capacity to do. And even though God knows us intimately and knows about all our greed and sin, God still loves us and cares about us and wants to be in relationship with us. God wants us to experience God's great love and be a part of what God is doing in the world to bring about justice and hope and peace and an abundance of life for all people.

God in God's greatness and goodness is looking for us and all we have to do is come out of hiding, all we have to do is acknowledge our failures and faults and accept God's forgiveness and offer of reconciliation. And as we follow Jesus we will learn from Jesus how to love God and love God's creation, including the people who are hard to love. By following Jesus we can grow in our relationship with God and learn to cooperate with God's purpose in the world. The spiritual life is a growing, evolving life—not a stagnant life. It's a life of conversion, a life change and transformation.

I like what Jesus says to Peter in our Gospel story: "You are Simon, son of John. You will be called Cephas (which is translated Peter)." Peter means "rock." What Jesus is saying is that you are what you are now—impetuous, stubborn, proud, but you will become a rock—firm, faithful, consistent. Peter would undergo a change of character as a disciple of Jesus. There would be many setbacks and failures, but under the guidance of Jesus and in the school of Jesus Peter would be transformed.

That is the possibility for you and me. We don't have to stay the way we are, we don't have to keep making the same mistakes. We don't have to remain enslaved to negative feelings and reactions. We don't have to keep repeating the same destructive patterns. We can change. Through discipleship to the living Christ we can change.

I love the story that Fred Craddock tells about the time he and his wife went to the Smokey Mountains to vacation. They left the kids at Grandma's house. They stopped to eat at a place called the Blackberry Inn. One side of the restaurant was solid glass and you could look out as you were eating and see the mountains.

They were in the restaurant, relaxed, looking at this huge menu. Fred was trying to find the hamburgers. An old man, well advanced in years, came by their table. "Good evenin'" said the old man. "Good evenin'" responded Fred. "Ya'll on vacation?" "Yes sir." "Havin' a good time?" And Fred's beginning to think, "Well, we were." Fred said, "Yes

sir.” “Ya'll gonna be here very long?” and Fred's thinking , “Maybe not.” Fred said, “No, we won't be here but a week.” “Well,” says the man, “I hope you have a good time. What do you do?” And Fred's thinking, “That's none of his business. We're on vacation. We got rid of the kids. I'm going to get rid of this old man.” “Well,” said Fred, “I teach in Seminary.” “Oh," said the man, "you're a preacher.” And with that he pulled up a chair.

He said, “I want to tell you a story. I was born back up here in these mountains. My mother wasn't married, and in those days, such shame. And when we went to town, the other women looked at her and looked at me, and began to guess who I was and who my father was, and the reproach that was hers fell upon me. And it was painful. At school the children had a name for me. I hid from the others at recess. I ate lunch alone.”

“I started going to a little church back in these mountains. There was a preacher; a cranky, rough preacher. Prince Albert Cole. Beard. Booming voice. He scarred me but he fascinated me. I would go just for the sermon. I was afraid somebody would speak to me in the earlier part and say, 'What's a boy like you doing in church.' And I was afraid. One Sunday after I'd been going for some time some of the people cued up the aisle and I couldn't rush out as I usually did. I couldn't get by and I thought, 'Oh no, somebody will say something to me. I need to get out of here.' Then I felt a hand on my shoulder, and I looked out of the corner of my eye and it was that preacher. I saw his beard and I saw that face, and I thought, 'Oh no!' And that preacher looked at me and said, ‘Well boy, boy . . . you're a child of,’ then he paused and I was thinking, ‘Oh no, here it comes,’ He said, ‘boy, you're a child . . . a child of God. I see a striking resemblance.’ Then he swatted me on the bottom and said, ‘Go claim your inheritance.’”

Fred said to the old man, “What's your name?” He said, “Ben Hooper.” “Ben Hooper?” thought Fred, “Where have I heard that name before?” Fred later remembered that the people of Tennessee twice elected as their governor an old country boy by the name of Ben Hooper.

Jesus says, “Come and see.” In the prologue the writer of this Gospel says that to as many as received him, the Word made flesh, to them God gave the right, the privilege of becoming children of God. That’s what we are. That’s what we all are—children of God! It’s now a matter of believing that, trusting that, claiming our inheritance, and living in the world as the children of God.

Perhaps you know people, friends or family that don’t know that yet—or have yet to claim their inheritance as the children of God. Perhaps like Andrew in our Gospel story you can find a way to bring them to Jesus. I don’t mean get them to believe exactly the way you do about Jesus. What I mean is that perhaps you can find a way to help them discover the good news that Jesus lived and taught—that they are loved by God, that they are God’s

children and all they need to do to experience first hand God's love and goodness is to claim their inheritance by faith.

Maybe some of you here today need to experience that anew—to believe and see and know God in fresh, new ways. God is looking for you. Jesus invites you, “Come and see.”

Gracious God, give us willing hearts to accept the invitation of Jesus to “come and see.” To know for ourselves the living Christ, the Word made flesh, the embodiment of grace and truth. And may we be filled with such gratitude and love that we cannot keep this to ourselves, but are compelled to invite others to discover for themselves the love and life that you have made available to us in Jesus Christ, our Lord.