

St. David's Presbyterian Church
St. John's, NL
"The Best Invitation of All"
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I've talked to you for the last two weeks about a bucket list and baptism. I figured I better continue the B's with the Best invitation of all. You've all been invited during Christmas and probably for New Year's too. You've been with family and with friends. Getting an invitation means that someone cares about you. Now I know we get a lot of junk mail, which seems to indicate that they care about us, when in fact they care only about our business or money. But when you get a genuine personal invitation, you feel you are important to someone, special in some way.

Let me give some examples. I got an invitation while shopping in a big box store to join the Barbershop Anchormen's choir. And I've enjoyed it so far. [Invitation] We had a lovely choir party at the Bruneau's. It was nice to be a part of that part of the church, and the choir is a good experience here. Talk to Leslie or Mike when he gets back from his honeymoon or any choir member, there's lots of room up front. I've been invited to people's homes, and into their lives in various situations; in crises, just because--with no reason, and for church business. I like to be invited, because invitations are becoming more and more rare. This isn't pressure for you to invite me, it simply is a fact that an individual either knows they have some place to drop by, or they often don't have the time or the invitation to appear at the door, or vicariously on the phone or email. Invitations are the way to connect.

Invitations come in all kinds of shapes and sizes. I was blessed to be able to go to Government House and be in that historic place along with representatives of other religions and spiritualities, while Ed Roberts was still holding that position. I met colleagues in ministry there and many others. It was good.

And perhaps you have received invitations from people or institutions which didn't really relay or convey the sense that you were truly welcome. This can happen when an invitation comes to you just because you are connected to someone who truly is invited. It can happen when someone is trying to be polite and do the right thing, but don't really want to spend time with you. Have you ever had that kind of invitation?

There are life changing invitations. I was once invited to a home bible study at a fellow musicians' house in California. I was loved in that group, even though I wasn't sure I was really interested in the Bible. But during the course of time with those people who loved me, I was convinced in that group that Christianity is really about relationship with Jesus Christ. I was shown that a living, daily conversation with Christ through the Scriptures was transformative and wonderful. I saw that while going to church was good and right, it made sense only in the context of the personal commitment to Christ, and because Jesus loved the church, His body, we can love the church too. Otherwise, there are simply too many reasons to not go to church, to criticize the church and to not be involved.

To put it another way: no matter how wonderful the people are in the congregation, no matter precious the memories of the place, no matter how much we had given in time and energy to the organization, nevertheless, the centre was Jesus, and knowing Him.

So as we read about the first disciples (disciple means follower or devotee, or perhaps in a sports analogy, a "fan.") As we read about the first disciples, we see them encountering Jesus and not really knowing much about him. Perhaps the only exception to this rule is John the Baptizer, who points out Jesus as the Son of God and the Lamb of God. Son of God is both a reference back to the Hebrew understanding as the Son of God being the King, the Messiah, the Anointed One who would bring in the Kingdom of God in the fullness of time and a reference to Jesus as God. This becomes clear throughout the Gospel of John. The Lamb of God is a reference to the fact that Jesus will not only be King, but High Priest as well and sacrifice on our behalf against our sins, those acts and thoughts of rebellion which speak against relationship with God.

John prophetically points us to the ultimate Prophet. He says Jesus is the One. And later, the writer of the Gospel of John, points us to the fact that John the Baptizer knew that his ministry was decreasing and Jesus' ministry was increasing. And let me say that no matter what you think about my ministry here, whether wonderful or not so hot, or anywhere in between, it is the Lord Jesus' ministry that matters here. And so I, like John the Baptizer, simply point the way to the One that makes the difference.

And as you choose to become more and more interested in this Jesus, you begin to ask questions and Jesus begins to answer. For example, we see in

verse 37 of John 1, that the disciples simply start following Jesus, given the encouragement of John the Baptizer. There are no words at this point, only following. Then Jesus asks a key question: "What are you looking for?" Jesus always gets to the heart of the matter fairly quickly. He asks us the same question here in this place today. What are you looking for? The music may not be to your taste. The prayers might not be the ones that you would like offered, or even offer yourself. The readings might not be the readings you would choose. But even in spite of all this, you can come to worship the One who makes all the difference in your life and mine. You're looking for meaning, for love, for a home, for belonging, for a taste of heaven on earth, for mercy and a listening ear. And it may be that I can't give that to you, in fact, no human being can give that to you as you desire or even crave. But the Lord can meet you and minister to you.

As we read further in the passage in John, I don't think the disciples were interested in Jesus' real estate or accommodation, when they asked him where he was staying. I think they were asking to spend time with him. So he speaks one of the best invitations that there is in the Scriptures, to them and to us, "Come and see." (1:39) Come and see how I can help you. Come and see what's important to me. Come and see my strength in your life as you face the storms, crises and challenges that come up. Come and see my deep love for you. Come and see.

Jesus helps us find our true identity. Andrew was there as one of those who was asking about spending time with Jesus. He was so moved after spending time with Jesus, that he went to get his brother Simon. I suppose you might call that a natural missionary response to the Lord. You just invite others to the One who has made such an impact on your life. And Jesus not only greets Simon, but gives him a new name. The new name is Cephas, in Aramaic, Peter, in Greek. Both of them mean "rock." The rock becomes something to build on, or later, more specifically, the confession of Peter becomes the rock on which Jesus builds. Because we know from reading the rest of the Gospels that Peter himself is pretty rocky. He has his ups and downs, just like we do. So Jesus gives him a new identity connected to Jesus' character.

And I believe Jesus does the same with us. He gives us a new identity, which is a totally new direction, away from narcissism (or self-absorption) to self-giving, away from disinterest in God to dedication to God. He transforms us with love.

I need to continually be transformed and changed by the One who is the Creator. Jesus earlier in John's chapter is called the Logos, the Word, the reason, the origin of life. We are invited to invite this One into our lives, and to make this the focus of our lives. Finding life, sharing life, caring about life because we have met the Life.

The invitation stands. Perhaps you've never given yourself completely and unreservedly to this One who is Life. Today is the day. Now is the time. It is the best invitation you will ever receive. Just say in your heart, I give myself unreservedly to You, Lord Jesus Christ. I turn away from my rebellion toward You, and I accept you as God and master.

And once you have received this invitation and accepted it, and are growing in the knowledge of the One who knows you, then the ongoing invitation is simply to spend time with Him who calls us by name, and to be all that we were meant to be. He will continually surprise with His resources, with the Holy Spirit whom the Father sent to keep us close to Him. Then the mission, the outreach, the caring about our world and our context happens in light of the life that we have from the Son.

Let us pray.