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SERMON TITLE: "Do You Want to See Great Things?"
SCRIPTURE: John 1:43-51
DATE: February 4, 2018
Check out the service at www.fpcd.org.

READ JOHN 1:43-51 and Psalm 1:1-6

Have you ever made an instant friend? What would draw you to such a person? When we moved to where we now live, we at first lived in an apartment. We would sit outside and chat with the neighbors. I remember making an instant friend. We became friends because our kids were in the same school and we were both building houses.

We became instant friends. We spent time together. We took our kids places. We expanded our circle of friends with other people who were moving in. It was great support to my family as we adjusted to the new town.

Andrew and his friend spent the afternoon with Jesus. Jesus was so compelling the two men immediately followed him, even going to where he was staying. Andrew got his brother Simon to come along. Jesus immediately accepted him, even renamed him Peter. This was an indication that they had moved into a new lifestyle; a new way of doing things.

But they didn't stay long. Before long they were going to Bethsaida, on the Sea of Galilee. Philip, Andrew, and Peter were from there. Philip, invited another friend named Nathanael to follow Jesus with them.

Nathanael was a realist. "From Nazareth? You've got to be kidding!" "You're following him?"

So Jesus was from the wrong side of the tracks. Even so, Nathanael was instantly impressed because Jesus seemed to know him. However, Jesus said, "You believe because I saw you under that fig tree? There's so much more! You will see heaven open; you will see angels at work; you will see the Son of Man."

Son of Man was a term Jesus used to refer to himself.

They all believed that Jesus was some sort of special person—that Moses and the prophets wrote about him; that he was the Son of God and the King of Israel. But what does that mean in everyday life?

Although following Jesus, these guys had no understanding of Jesus at all. Nevertheless, three days later

they went to a wedding with Jesus at Cana in Galilee. Jesus takes us with him just as we are. He works with us as we walk with him. The journey had begun.

But they did not know a thing about Jesus. They did not know that he held the gift of life itself in his hands. They didn't know that within Jesus was the light that lights up all darkness. They did not realize his enormous power of deliverance and his compelling call to justice. To them, He was Jesus, Joseph and Mary's son.

He was called the Son of God by John the Baptist, but what did that mean? Would he liberate Israel from the Romans? They hadn't heard a sermon of truth delivered with grace. They had not yet seen him walk away when people wanted to make him king. They did not understand that he would do exactly what His Father had planned. They had not learned that faith is not merit earned by keeping the law. The Holy Spirit was foreign to them.

Yes, a few people in the Old Testament, like Moses and Elijah, had the Spirit of God. But they lived so long ago it did not seem relevant.

Perhaps the disciples do not seem particularly relevant to you. Though they were legends in their own time, *does that matter now?*

But, this was the beginning. Andrew, Peter, Philip, and Nathanael weren't legends yet. They were simply young men checking out this young man Jesus. They set out to see heaven opened and angels at work, whatever that meant.

The wedding at Cana was a smash hit because Jesus turned water into several \$1,000 jugs of wine. This is great! We hit the jackpot.

Afterward, they took a little vacation with Jesus and his mother and brothers. I wonder if they brought him a jug of water . . . hoping. ☺

The next week they watched as Jesus unexpectedly wound some cords of leather into a whip and began driving merchants and money changers out of the Jerusalem temple. Overturning their tables, he began shouting, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a

marketplace!" (Jn 2:15-16). They didn't understand it all until after he was resurrected. Then they would see Jesus in the Scriptures and believe Jesus' words. Only then would they understand totally that he was the Son of God who came to give life and deliverance.

It's like that for us. We hear their stories, but faith is a journey that happens little by little. When we follow Jesus daily and keep that close connection, we grow and our own liberation happens.

It would be three long years before the disciples would understand these things. He did all kinds of things that were unorthodox. He confronted the Pharisees about hypocrisy; spoke with grace and truth to questionable women and tax collectors. He ate with anybody and everybody and it was hard to understand zeal for God that was so great that he cleansed the temple.

Let's put ourselves into the disciples' shoes. Would you have given up? Would you have said, 'I don't understand this great thing of an open door to heaven with angels coming and going to earth! Why try?' But they wanted to see great things. So they didn't walk away.

Everywhere he went Jesus had this overwhelming compassion for those who needed help and again and again he stopped to help them, talk to them, and heal their children, regardless of who they were. One was a ruling official; the next a paralyzed beggar; another, a blind man.

He healed everyday—even on the Sabbath, which so annoyed the Pharisees, who did not want to see great things.

Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, the Son can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise. The Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing; and he will show him greater works than these, so that you will be astonished" (Jn 5:19-20). The disciples were definitely astonished.

Then one day they went back to Bethsaida, their hometown. It was surrounded by acres of lush green fields. Perhaps Peter, Andrew, Philip, and Nathanael had played little league on those fields. Because of all Jesus had done, hundreds of people showed up there. And on that day, Jesus said to his disciples in his usual thoughtfulness, "Where can we buy bread to feed them?"

So the operative word was "we."

Andrew, Peter, Philip, Nathanael and the others looked at him like he had two heads. Wha??? Why would you want

to do that??? 'Well, they're hungry,' he said. 'I don't want them to faint from hunger.'

Andrew grabbed a kid's lunch and said—*here, this is the best we can do*. Human effort is wholly inadequate, but heaven opened and took care of the need.

So they learned. There were triumphs, like feeding the 5,000, but also setbacks, when they couldn't heal someone or they were mad or rude to others or didn't want to associate with someone or fear of the Pharisees rose in them. But over time the disciples realized that even though many rejected him, they would not. Their hearts were opening. Jesus' passion, zeal, and love for God was becoming their own.

Is your love for Jesus growing? You know that many reject Jesus. But you are persuaded to live a life of faith. Do you want to learn how heaven is open to you?

Are you praying for someone in bondage who needs Jesus? Do you have a need but your resources are wholly inadequate? Are you discouraged from little results?

Sometimes we may think like the disciples, "This teaching is too difficult, who can accept it?" (Jn 6:60). But as these men understood Jesus' vision, they found themselves healing people, confronting Pharisees over burdensome rules, sharing their money with those in need and Jesus' message with tax collectors, governmental rulers, and people who were different from them. Even persecution could not stop them, until they became legends.

My friend whom I met when our kids were young is long gone. She moved and we lost touch. However, Jesus does not lose touch with us when our circumstances change and time passes. He never stops inviting people to follow him.

The 1st Century turned into the 2nd Century, and so on until the 21st Century, and we find Jesus here today, beckoning us. It is because of the faith of early Christians that we are here. We must have the vision of heaven, too.

Hear Jesus' voice: 'You believe because I saw you at First Presbyterian Church on Freeman Street? You will see more than that! You will see heaven open and angels ascending and descending over Duncanville, Texas through the work I inspire in you.'

How will 21st Century Christians be known? Will we be legends of faith? My hope is that we are known as people whose vision of Jesus and heaven inspires many to believe.

Do you want to see great things? AMEN