

Text: John 1:43-49

Theme: If You Invite Them...

October 2, 2016

A number of years ago, the movie, "Field of Dreams," was released, a story of a man who built a baseball field in the middle of his cornfield in Iowa because a voice told him, "If you build it, they will come." It was a heart-warming movie about a man, a dream, and an invitation, strange as it may have been. In our text, we find two invitations, one received with excitement and one initially received with all the skepticism of Field of Dreams. As we focus on Phillip and Nathanael, we consider our theme: If You Invite Them...

I. In the same manner Jesus invited, He encourages us to invite. A. Yet, too often, His invitation is viewed as less than exciting. 1. Some view it as less than exciting because they doubt its validity. As Jesus invited Nathanael, his response verifies his doubt, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth." It's almost like saying, "Do you really expect baseball heroes to come walking out of a cornfield? For so many around us today, there's a sense of doubt, a sense of disbelief, a sense that Jesus isn't real and surely won't appear on their behalf even without a cornfield. Because of that doubt and disbelief, we remain reluctant to invite others into the presence of God.

2. Others view it as less than exciting because they are cautious. For people who aren't accustomed to worship, it seems strange and that strangeness creates a significant amount of caution. If you heard voices telling you to build a baseball field in your cornfield, wouldn't you be cautious with your next step lest others dubbed you as off your rocker or something worse. As we think about inviting others to a place such as this, we can expect cautiousness. We may know what they don't know. We may have experienced first-hand this Jesus, but others, like Nathanael, are still in the dark and need us to understand their caution.

3. Along with caution, is a sense of suspicion. Remember Nathanael's response, "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" Nazareth wasn't Jerusalem or even close to the holy city. It was out on the fringes, next door to those despised Gentiles who were believed to be outside of the faith because they didn't carry the coveted Jewish name. Nathanael was suspicious because it didn't seem any more logical than baseball greats appearing from a cornfield. So many today are the Nathanael's. They are suspicious of this Jesus and His promises, suspicious that He will let them down, so suspicious that they'd rather keep their distance than step onto the playing field.

B. Since so many are sitting in the bleachers instead of in God's dug out, how do we invite them to come? 1. We invite them by keeping it simple. Nathanael needed the message; he needed Jesus, but he needed it in spoonful-size amounts. "Follow Me," was simply too much for him initially. As we step onto the playing field, Jesus says, "Invite them into My presence with simplicity. Keep it simple. Share the message with them in baby steps. Keep it in terms they can comprehend, terms they can connect with. Meet them where they are and then allow Me to lead them into the infield of the faith."

2. We invite them by stepping into their shoes. If Fields of Dreams were real, how would it feel to step into that farmer's shoes, to step out in faith when surrounded by opposition? As we step into other people's shoes, we see things from

their perspective. We understand why they do what they do and the more we understand, the more able we are to invite them in such a way that our invitation is considered, perhaps without our knowing it, and, at some later date, accepted when they choose to step into the presence of God in a very real and personal way. The better we understand life in their shoes, the more patient we will be to share an invitation.

3. We invite them by keeping it personal. How did Jesus invite Nathanael? To Phillip, Jesus simply said, "Follow Me," and he followed with excitement. But with Nathanael, Jesus uses a different approach. He uses Phillip to deliver His invitation, to keep His message personal. People who know people, friends who know friends, those are always the best combinations for invitation. Our personal conversations that create an open door, those become God's tools to open the door, to invite people to step out of the cornfield of an empty life and onto that playing field where God, working through you, communicates that personal, heartwarming message.

4. We invite by show and tell. In Field of Dreams, most everybody thought he was crazy to build a ball field in his cornfield. But when he finished and suddenly those baseball heroes stepped onto the field, people who knew what he knew, who could see what he saw, suddenly believed what he told them. Although show and tell may be child's play, Jesus invites us to show and tell because He knows what will work and who will notice when we think no one is looking. By what we do and what we say outside these walls, people see the example they need, the examples made possible by our great God working through you and me.

5. We invite by creating an inviting environment. A baseball field was a logical fit for baseball heroes of the past. If only it had been real, it would have made perfect sense to everyone involved. Today, within our church settings, we need to create an inviting environment. Those things we overlook every Sunday or simply take for granted, they notice almost immediately. To create an inviting environment, we step back into their shoes and we drive into our parking lot, walk up to our entrance door, walk down our hallways and into the sanctuary so that we see what they see, so that we know what to change to make ourselves more inviting.

6. We invite by being gently persistent. Building a baseball field in a cornfield took persistence. Without it, he would have never seen his dream in the movie become a reality. Within the lives of God's people, gentle persistence gradually leads others to step through those doors, to engage in worship, to encounter Jesus in their hearts instead of speaking only from their lips. Although faith and statistics seldom belong together, the statistics show that your seventh gentle, patient invitation is as effective as your very first. Therefore, we need to keep doing what we are called to do with persistence and with gentleness. Jesus will direct the outcome.

7. As I created the rough draft of this sermon, I was actually sitting at the Field of Dreams movie site in Dyersville, Iowa. Although it was just a movie, being there created an unusual reaction within. As we share Jesus, expect Him to create a reaction that leads them to come because Jesus says to our hearts, "If you invite them, they will come!" Amen.