

I. Advanced organizer

- A. I didn't know exactly what to expect when I showed up in my pastor's office for an appointment that day, but **I was hopeful things would go well**. I was 28 or 29 at the time, a brand new mother, and I had come to talk to my Senior Pastor about the reality that I was beginning to sense that someday, I, like him, felt called to start a community of faith. **I was there to confess my interest in becoming what in our church subculture was known as a "church planter"**.
1. I was hopeful he'd be receptive and helpful, because I knew this topic happened to be what this particular pastor was all about. **He wasn't just the lead pastor of our large church, he was the head of church planting for our denomination**. He'd had this conversation about discerning starting a church with countless young people before. People came to our church from around the globe to intern with him, to be coached by him, to be trained before they headed out and tried to start their own communities, doing exactly what I felt called to do. And I thought I really had an advantage to secure his support - he already knew me. I'd been leading worship in his church for years. I'd be speaking at his wife's women's events. I'd been mentored by her and her friends. I'd been volunteering with the youth group his kids were in. I was his daughter's Bible study leader.
 2. **I started with the funny story about that conference he had led years before**. Back when Jason and I were young fiancée's attending a church conference together, and this pastor had invited everyone under thirty to come forward so that they could pray for us and "commission the next generation". I shared how I felt like I heard one of the clearest potential words from God I've heard in prayer, saying "someday you guys are gonna start a church. Don't tell Jason. Just pray about it and see what I'm gonna do." I shared how at the time, looking around at a church culture in which men led churches and women were pastor's wives, I rolled my eyes and thought, "Shoot. You're gonna call Jason to be a pastor. I'm gonna get stuck being a pastor's wife." But I committed to praying for the eventual church and sure enough years later I was beginning to understand that **maybe the reason I sensed I wasn't to tell Jason was because it wasn't actually for him at all. This dream was for me**.
 3. I talked about my own emerging sense of a **call to ministry**, and the assumption I'd made at first that if I went that route, I'd settle into a career as a worship pastor, the pastor in charge of the music essentially, and one that seemed fairly open to women. Still, as I began to express an interest in ministry and was given chances to preach, I enjoyed it. I found that I was good at it.
 4. I told him about the moment that my mentor at the time, one of the female pastors on staff who worked for him, a woman I'll call Susan, had told me that as she looked at me in action, and she looked at my mix of gifts, she didn't think I was ultimately meant to be a worship pastor. **She thought I might be gifted and called to someday plant a church myself**. I shared how when she said that, I felt overwhelmed and amazed because it rung so true, but also felt so scandalous and impossible. It felt like everything made sense and clicked into place, but it also came with so many questions. After all, **we were in a church movement that had not yet blessed women at the most senior levels of leadership**. Still, weeks later, it was announced that the national board of our denomination was now officially taking that position: women were now blessed to lead even at the most Senior Levels. My Senior Pastor was one of the national board members helping lead the way for that change, blessing women at all levels, something I think my female mentor knew was coming when she began to encourage me.

5. And then there was what, for me, felt like the straw that broke the camel's back of my own fear and resistance: I shared how just a few months after that epiphany moment with my mentor, I was towards the end of my first pregnancy, leading worship with a huge belly at a women's conference that this man's wife had organized, along with two of her best pastor friends. I **shared how I found myself being prayed for by one of those friends, a pastor from Iowa named Adey Wassink.** I didn't know her personally at the time; I just knew her by reputation. She had been preaching a stirring teaching about saying "yes" to the thing God was calling you into.
6. At the end she had called all the women who felt like God might be inviting them to someday plant a church to come forward and be prayed for. And so I, along with a number of other women, responded to this call that felt too on-point for me to deny. **As Adey saw me in the crowd, and came over to me, put her hand on me, and prayed, I fell on the ground for the first and only time in my life, overcome by the Spirit in all of my very pregnant glory.** As I lay there I felt all of my fear and resistance give way to a sense of surrender. I felt sure that even if this journey to some day start a church was doomed to failure, I had to at least pursue it.
7. It was a powerful story. I knew it was. **It was the kind of story that I knew usually delighted this pastor.** He told these kind of crazy God-intervening in your life in unexpected ways that unfold over time in so many of his sermons. Which is why I was bit taken aback when his response was more guarded than enthusiastic.
8. "You might not be wrong." He said. (Not exactly a ringing endorsement.) He went on. **'You might not be wrong, but I can't help you. Have you tried talking to Adey?'**
 - a) And there it was. He didn't need to spell out **why he "couldn't" help me pursue the path of church planting.** I understood. His reference to one of the only female lead pastors in the denomination at the time made it clear. **The problem wasn't my story or my sense of call; it was my gender.** I had hoped that wouldn't be an issue. This was one of the leaders who had just supported the move, in theory, to bless women to be senior pastors. But apparently that hadn't impacted his personal sense of the role he could play in developing a female church planter. His model of raising up future planters was well known. He had a "posse" of young men at all times. He took them places with him; when he went to his many speaking engagements, he brought them along. They were his travel buddies, driving on long car rides together, sharing hotel rooms. I didn't fit in that model in his mind. There was not an imagination for any other way of doing it. And so the answer was no. If I was going to find a support structure in pursuing this dream going forward, it wasn't going to be from him.
9. Well, I'm starting with this story because this, for me, is a story about **that challenging season that many of us find ourselves in as young adults trying to navigate a way forward into building a life,** and looking for answers to the big questions of what we want our lives to look like and how we live well into the things we're feeling drawn to. This feels relevant to me in this particular moment of post-Covid transition, because as we as a community are starting to emerge from the Zoom only space, we've been talking about **growing as an intergenerational community.** Part of that growth into intergenerational care of course means once again making space for young kids in our space and working to fully include them in our community. But young children aren't the only group we want to pay attention to.
10. Increasingly, **Haven is incorporating more young adults in our midst.** Last weekend we acknowledged a number of children and young adults who have been promoted or

graduated, including those who have just graduated from high school and college. These folks, and those who are in similar stages of life to them, are an emerging part of our community, too. They may or may not be here today in Zoom, but they are increasingly a part of our demographic, and I would argue that we have a unique opportunity to bless these folks and to, as Jeanne says, “root for their rising.” As we think about seasons in this time of transition, I think it’s important to consider what role each of us in this community might have in supporting our youth and young adults and encouraging them as they come up.

II. As I’ve been thinking about this transition for our community and how we might consider it together, I’ve found myself **thinking about Jesus, and his approach to the young adults in his world**. For those of us who are familiar with the Jesus story, I think it can be easy to overlook some of the basics, like Jesus traveling with a group of close followers, or disciples, without really thinking about what he’s doing, why, how it fit into the culture of his day, or how it might be instructive to us in a very different context. But that’s what I’d like to consider a bit today. Because I think there is something there that’s important for all of us to absorb as we continue to transition, and I hope it might prepare us to respond well as folks in our community dream and discern the lives they are building, and look for support along the way.

A. So we’re going to look today from a story very early in the gospel of John at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry. **We pick it up with John focused on John the Baptist, but the focus is starting to shift.** John the baptizer has just described how he experienced something unique when he baptized Jesus, the Spirit descending on him like a dove, leading him to conclude that this man is the “chosen one of God” he had been sent to prepare their community for. And that’s where we pick up the story, in John chapter 1, vs. 35.

B. 35 Again the next day John was standing there with two of his disciples. 36 Gazing at Jesus as he walked by, he said, “Look, the Lamb of God!” 37 When John’s two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. 38 Jesus turned around and saw them following and said to them, “What do you want?” So they said to him, “Rabbi” (which is translated Teacher), “where are you staying?” 39 Jesus answered, “Come and you will see.” So they came and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day. Now it was about four o’clock in the afternoon.

1. Quick aside before going on. Let’s just name that this is a funny moment. I think John’s disciples feel caught off guard; a little tongue tied. They feel drawn to Jesus because of what John has told them, but when they approach and he notices them, I think maybe they don’t know quite what to say. They don’t want to gush with expectation for who he might be, the moment they meet him and so they reach for small talk. Um...where are you staying? But Jesus meets them where they’re at and invites them further. He seems to sense that they are more interested in knowing him than finding out his address. So he doesn’t just answer the surface question and move on. He invites them to come with him and get the answer themselves. He invites them to know him and be known by him. Well, the story continues:

C. 40 Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter, was one of the two disciples who heard what John said and followed Jesus. 41 He first found his own brother Simon and told him, “We have found the Messiah!” (which is translated Christ). 42 Andrew brought Simon to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, “You are Simon, the son of John. You will be called Cephas” (which is translated Peter).

43 On the next day Jesus wanted to set out for Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." 44 (Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the town of Andrew and Peter.) 45 Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the law, and the prophets also wrote about—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." 46 Nathanael replied, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip replied, "Come and see."

47 Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and exclaimed, "Look, a true Israelite in whom there is no deceit!" 48 Nathanael asked him, "How do you know me?" Jesus replied, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." 49 Nathanael answered him, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel!" 50 Jesus said to him, "Because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You will see greater things than these." 51 He continued, "I tell all of you the solemn truth—you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

D. OK, a few more initial thoughts as we think about this story.

1. We first saw the story start with a couple of John the Baptist's followers being pointed to Jesus and drawn to him by their connection to John.
2. Then we start to see others connect with him directly. And then there seems to be a growing contagious energy; one person has an encounter, and then they go get someone else, and things seem to snowball.
3. So who are all these guys? (And yes, in this patriarchal time, they are all guys at the beginning, though that will shift as the story goes on.) But back to these guys: **what do we know about them?** They are likely pretty young men, many of them we'd consider still kids today. Jesus was in his early 30s at this time, but it's believed by most scholars that **most of his closest followers were younger**. So these guys he's encountering were probably teenagers or in their early twenties. Some were probably as young as 13. These are young men who are being or have recently been trained in their family trade. Most of them are fisherman, and have good reason to assume that this trade they've been learning is what they will essentially be doing with their lives. Until they have a unique encounter with Jesus.

E. If you notice there seems to be a recurring theme in this story the way John tells it. And **the theme seems to be connected to the idea of sight**. In these sixteen verses John uses some word explicitly mentioning sight eleven times.

1. "Gazing at Jesus". "Look, the lamb of God" "Jesus saw them following", "Come and you will see". It's in almost every line. So what is that about? What is it about sight that is so important to this story? And what might it tell us about Jesus' approach to these and the other young people he calls around him. I want to focus on a couple of things I think are worth noting here.

F. **Jesus sees something in these young people that others don't see.**

1. To understand what's unique about how Jesus is operating, it's helpful to know more about the context he's in, and how generally a Rabbi called a group of disciples to follow him.
2. In the first century in Israel, there were **various phases of torah education a boy growing into a young man went through**. He'd start when he was about four or five and go till about ten, learning his letters and then eventually reading the torah, and eventually trying to memorize the entire first five books of the Hebrew Bible. Around age 10 those

students who did really, really well, would be invited to go on in their studies and try to memorize the rest of the Hebrew Bible. The others would be dismissed with a common blessing. “Bless you my son, go learn your father’s trade and pray that your children are smarter than you are so they might become Rabbis.” Ouch, right?

3. So if you made that cut and went forward, a few years later, there was another level to achieve. Most who made it through the first cut wouldn’t make the second. By age thirteen or fourteen, they too would be told, “Go learn your father’s trade”.
4. But for those who were the high achievers in learning torah, **they then had the opportunity to identify a rabbi**, to approach the teacher they wanted to emulate, to learn from, to study under and to eventually become like. And if you were lucky, when you approached a rabbi and he asked you questions, he quizzed you on matters of torah, if approved of your answers, you’d be accepted to be one of this rabbi's disciples. The identification of a student with his rabbi was considered so intimate that the common blessing for a disciple in the era was **“May you be covered in the dust of your rabbi.”** As you walk behind him, may you be so close that the dust that his feet disturbs land on you. As you sit at his feet on the ground listening to his teaching, may the very dust that he causes to fly up land on you. It was a great honor to be the disciple of a rabbi and very few men in Israel were given that honor. **Very few were thought worthy of being covered in rabbi dust.**
5. Which is why **what Jesus is doing here is so radical.**
 - a) First of all, **he’s making invitations.** He’s approaching people, just as he’s clearly welcoming those who approach him, without making them prove their spiritual knowledge to experience belonging. All of these folks are working trades, which means at some point they didn’t make the cut to study with a rabbi. They were considered not “the right types”. They didn’t fit the current model. And yet **Jesus sees something in them that their previous torah teachers apparently didn’t.** He seems to have different criteria for who he’s interested in investing in.
 - b) It’s not just that Jesus sees past these guys’ class, social status, and level of education. The story also makes clear that he sees them in unique ways. He has **insight into who these guys are as people.** In a couple of instances it’s clear, even in these first encounters, that Jesus has insight into these folks’ character, and when he speaks these insights out, they have power.
 - (1) We see it when he tells **Simon he would be called “Cephas” or Peter, a name that means “Rock”.** From the beginning he’s calling out this leadership quality in Peter that will play an important role in the future of building Jesus’ spiritual community.
 - (2) We see it when **he tells Nathanael that he’s honest,** “a true Israelite in whom there is no deceit”.
 - (3) Yes, part of this knowledge is clearly supernatural. But there is also a natural power that’s released simply in having others see things in you and acknowledge them. There’s a power in having things named. And you don’t have to be Jesus to do it.
 - (4) This was what was happening for me many years ago when my mentor Susan at the time said, “Leah, I think you could plant a church.” She was saying something that in my depth I knew to be true, it rung with truth, but I did not have the confidence or boldness to yet say it myself. I needed someone like her who had insight and experience and wisdom to see it in me and speak it out loud, for me to have the capacity to see it in myself.

(5) What that female pastor was ultimately affirming in me, is something akin to what Jesus was affirming in his disciples, and it's something I think all of us are invited to affirm in people of all generations in our community, but particularly our young people who may need the most help identifying this truth: **your story is a sacred story and it has spiritual power. God is present with you and in you. And there is space here for your sacred story to make a meaningful impact on the world around you.**

(6) This I think is what Jesus sees and is communicating with each of the people he encounters and connects with - from these first fisherman, to the woman at the well, to Mary and her sister Martha, to each person he healed and each child he blessed. It's what I believe he wants to communicate to each of us and wants us to communicate to one another. And it comes with an invitation, which brings me to the other insight from this story.

G. Jesus invites his followers to see something more.

1. The word play our storyteller John is doing with the concept of sight doesn't just go one way. Jesus, in the story, responds to the people he is seeing, by inviting *them* to greater sight. When asked where he's staying, he responds by saying "**come and see**". When Nathanael marvels at Jesus' capacity to see him, Jesus makes clear that Nathanael himself will "see greater things".
2. The invitation to "come and see" is contagious. Jesus invites the first followers to come and see. Verses later, it's the followers who are saying the same thing to their friends: come and see.
3. Because **Jesus sees the sacredness in each person he encounters, he wants them to discover it too.** He wants their metaphorical eyes to be opened,. He wants them to see their own spiritual power and to see it in the others around them. And so he invites them to a journey. He invites them to follow. He invites them to come and see. To perceive new things. To notice the sacred dust of the Divine surrounding them, and to be people who are stirring up their own divine dust clouds and scattering God's presence in whatever places they find themselves in. He invites them to actively participate in the grand benevolent Kingdom of God.

H. Just weeks after that disappointing conversation with my senior pastor, I found myself on a couch in Iowa City, sitting in the living room of that other pastor I had met months before. After being told by my mentor Susan, and my Senior Pastor to connect with her, I had gone ahead and reached out. We spoke on the phone. She invited Jason and I and our six month old baby Elliott to come visit her and her family in Iowa City; to come and see what their church was like; what their family life was like. To have a picture of what it could look to be a female lead pastor who was also a mother.

I. So we came for a quick weekend trip. We stayed in their home. We met their kids and some of their friends. I led worship at their church. And after the service, we sat on the couch in the living room and Adey asked to hear my story. I shared some of the same details I had shared just weeks before with my Senior Pastor. But this time, the response was different.

J. Hearing what had brought me there that day, hearing my own questions and fears about how I could possibly live into this dream of starting a community of faith as a woman, as a mom, but also my heart to create safe spaces for people who couldn't feel included, and at home in so many of our churches, Adey was moved. I could see a mist in her eyes and I could sense a gravity in her voice as she spoke.

K. "Leah, being with you and hearing your story: **I feel like Elizabeth greeting her cousin Mary.** The child in my womb is leaping to meet you and sense what is growing in you. I think you

should come, move here to Iowa City, intern for me, learn what you can learn, and some day, we'll bless you and send you out to start your church."

- L.** When Jason and I made the four hour drive through corn fields from Chicago to Iowa City that weekend, baby in tow, we had no intention or desire ever to go there again, let alone move there, buy a house there, or have two more babies in that city. But all of those things happened because **a pastor named Adey saw something in me that others hadn't seen.** And she spoke it out. And she gave me capacity to see it and speak it of myself, and she invited me to "come and see" and to live into the next leg of my spiritual journey. And that has power. I don't think Haven would exist if she hadn't opened herself to me and my story at a pivotal moment and invited relationship. Invited companionship. If she hadn't actively rooted for my rising.
- M.** So Haven, as we continue to grow as a community on the other side of this season of such disruption, I want to encourage all of us in this space to be mindful, not only of our own needs in this season, but also of our own capacity to **influence and actively root for the rising of those around us, particularly our youth and young adults.** It could be so tempting to just hunker down and take care of ourselves; out of necessity many of us have been doing that for the last fifteen months. But as we begin to move into another moment, a different season, **I think at least some of us are starting to experience enough healing, enough hope, enough of our own spiritual strength that we have something to give away.** We have the capacity to connect with someone who could use our encouragement. And it can happen in all kinds of ways. It doesn't have to mean signing up to volunteer with the kids on Sundays, though it could. It might simply mean asking the younger person you're chatting with on Sunday into a deeper conversation, and taking the time to really listen. Maybe it's taking them out to lunch, or grabbing a cup of coffee. Or just making it clear when you see them that you do see them, and that you see beauty and sacred strength in them, and you want them to know that. Remember, this is not just for what some of us might think of as the "elders" in our community. Jesus was doing it in his early 30s. Wherever you are generationally, you have something to share with those coming behind you.
- N.** So may we, as a Haven community, be people who perceive one another in unique ways and invite one another to new perception too. And may we all find ourselves covered with sacred dust. Amen.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Have you had people in your life who saw things in you that others didn't see? Or people you wish would see something in you but wouldn't? How did those experiences impact you?
2. Who are the people who've invited you to "come and see"?
3. How might our community grow in investing in the coming generations?