

A few years ago, a dear friend of mine came up to visit. I gave him the grand tour of Hamilton, starting with a walk around downtown and a stroll through the Farmer's Market. We gnawed on maple candy and listened to a goat farmer extol the virtues of God's lawnmowers, and he invited us to come out and take a gander. We promised to, with no real intention of ever going, and sidled up to the next booth where a distiller shared their wares in tiny communion cups, and she invited us to come to the distillery to try the full selection, and we promised to with every intention of making good on that invitation. We filled up on coffee and made our way to Parry's where, before walking inside, I asked him to name an object, any object, and we'd see if Parry's had it. An hour later, we walked out with a tarp, a half-gallon of syrup, six feet of rain gutters, and an external harddrive. From there, we dropped off our goods and made our way to Colgate, overlooking the ski slope and pondering the big questions of life on the Darwin Path. A little orange newt kept our minds busy for a solid ten minutes until it disappeared into the remains of a fallen log.

And then, the real highlight of the day: we stopped by a dairy farm and marveled at the delicious butters and curds and the sheer amount of trust inherent to a farm stand with goods and money bucket out in the open. While we were standing out front of the farm store, the owner came out, and once we rehashed the highlights of the day, the dairy farmer looked at me and my friend, his eyes big and excited, and said, "you wanna come and see my butter churn collection?" Now, I don't know about you, but I do not have an innate love of butter churns, but I do know that when someone gets that excited and turns into a kid for a second in spite of themselves, you say yes 'cause whatever it is you're in for a treat. So, we moseyed down the hill to take a look at what we thought was gonna be a few butter churns, but we were met with an enormous room filled with, I don't know, 30 churns? Maybe it was 50, it was more churns than I'd ever seen in my life. And he'd organized 'em around the edge of the room in chronological order. So, you could start with the basic design, a wooden cylinder with a kind of plunger down the middle, you know the one. And then each churn to the right had some technological advancement. Like, one replaced the simple plunger with paddles, and then another took those paddles and put 'em on a slant, and then another put little holes in those slanted paddles, and then another turned the whole thing sideways so you could rock the churn instead of plunge it, and then another took the rocking churn and put a baby's bed on top of it so you could cover two chores at once.

Now, admittedly, when my friend and I first walked in, we sorta looked at each other like, "whatever, it's something to do," but it did not take long to get really and truly interested and then fascinated and then kind of excited to see what new idea they'd come up with next. And boy did they come up with some ideas. My favorite was the multi-paddled rocking churn attached by an enormous belt to a dog's treadmill. It even had a hole left for a water bowl! See, I'm getting excited just remembering the thing. And I never would've known about it if that farmer hadn't invited us to come and see. That was a wonderful day, and I'm so glad to have invited my friend up here and so glad to show off Hamilton and even more glad to have Hamilton show off right back. But something even cooler happened when we got back to the house. A quick caveat: this friend is not a Christian. He's Buddhist, and I have to say, given what I knew of him back in the day, I found that a little surprising. Like, that was way more organized religion than I ever expected him to be interested in. So, when he came to visit, I wanted to make sure he felt comfortable and not at all weirded out by spending a weekend with a priest. So it came as a big surprise when we got back to the house after a long day of traipsing, and he asked to see the church. I guess it shouldn't've been a surprise. It's a big part of my life up here, and it is right next door, but I don't know, I guess I thought he wouldn't be interested or worse, might feel coerced or offended, so I didn't make the offer. But once he asked, of course I brought him in, and pretty quickly I saw the same look of

wonder on his face that he'd had back at the dairy farm. And I realized I was talking about this place the same way that farmer was talking about those churns. And you know what? He wasn't in the least bit offended. And he asked questions. And he just embraced another side of who I am and what my life is in this place. It's funny, I thought to invite him to Hamilton. And I asked him to come and see the town and the farmer's market and the coffee shops and Parry's and Colgate and newts and cheese curds, but I was overly cautious about inviting him to come and see the actual reason I'm in this particular place.

Now, I know it's never quite as simple as all that. I know it's totally harmless to talk to a friend about goats or butter or even what Parry's has in stock, and all that's real life and part of building up relationships. I get that. I know it's already a trick to ask a friend to a hockey game or dinner or a movie. I get that, too. And I know it's a huge thing to invite someone to come and see what your life is like, and it's even bigger to ask someone to come and see your passions. Like, can you imagine what that dairy farmer would've felt if my friend and I had scoffed at the butter churn invitation and turned him down? There's a ton of vulnerability there. But why would I have been so eager to share all those peripheral aspects of my life and myself and yet so careful not to share the core of my life in Hamilton? I mean, yes, there's a million weirdly coercive and spiritually harmful reasons not to step on the landmine of religion with our friends. And also, y'all, they're our friends. They've probably said no to us before. They've probably turned down other invitations. They've probably rejected a tv show recommendation or read our favorite book and eviscerated the narrator. They've stayed with us when we're great and, if they're actually friends, they've stayed with us when we're not so great. And we don't want to risk any of that, and we don't want to offend, and we don't want to make things awkward, but by being so dang careful, we keep a significant portion of ourselves hidden away from the people most important to us. I think I threw the baby out with the bathwater when I made a point not to invite my friend into the church. I think I was so worried about offending him that I forgot there are ways to invite without being a jerk about it.

From what I can figure, the phrase "come and see" shows up in scripture about a dozen times. Jesus says it in this Gospel, but it doesn't come out of nowhere. The groundwork is laid already, and when the time is right, he makes that invitation. Some take him up on it, some don't, no hard feelings. He can still sit down with them over dinner and a good foot-washing without getting weird about it. Come and see, it's so simple. So much simpler than we make it out to be. Now, I know none of us want to get confused with those *other* religious types, whoever they are, but also, there's a hard truth about places like ours. Most of Hamilton is not chock-full of people sitting at home right now thinking about St. Thomas'. There's even some folks that don't know we're here. We need to change that. We need to make sure St. Thomas' is a place people know about, a place with a reputation for showing up, a place of warm welcome and gentle invitation. A place people want to come and see, and a people who say "come and see." It's a delicate thing, I know. But we can't wait for people to figure out we're here and decide to walk in on their own. We'll see a few folks that way, but we're missing out on what makes this beautiful village so beautiful if the village passes us by.

Put another way, if people know where we are and what we're about and still decide not to come, that's okay by me. But if they aren't here because they don't know here is an option for them, we're not doing our job. Too much of the world thinks Christianity means you can't be gay or trans or rational or interested in justice or troubled by wealth inequality or haunted by systemic and historical sins. Too much of the world thinks all Christians are the same and "the same" means the Christians they see on TV. And y'all, I'll tell you this. If that were true, if all Christians were the same and were all like the ones you see on TV, most of us wouldn't be here in this room right now. I sure wouldn't be. It irks me to no end to be lumped in with a group of folks so antithetical to my own beliefs that I can barely recognize them as spiritual kin. And yet, I'd rather not overstep

with a friend than correct that misunderstanding. A misunderstanding that does harm to us and to Christianity as a whole. And it's so simple, sort of, to correct it. Three words: Come and see.

We give of our own treasures to help those in harm's way. Come and see.

We don't measure God's love by the kind of car we drive. Come and see.

We seek justice and defend the oppressed. Come and see.

We've got great music and great snacks. Come and see.

We believe drag queens are pretty much the same as anyone else. Come and see.

We even keep a unicorn on hand in case of LGBTQ-adjacent emergencies. Come and see.

And we aren't gonna treat you any different if you decide not to.

But maybe you outta, at least, come and see.