

COME AND SEE!
2nd Sunday after Epiphany
Rev. Steven D. Spencer - Pastor
John 1:43-51

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!" Nathanael said to him, "How do you know me?" Jesus answered him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." Nathanael answered him, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" Jesus answered him, "Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these." And he said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

In our reading today Jesus is out making disciples. In Greek the word for "disciple" means pupil or learner, one who follows by hearing the voice of his teacher. From disciple we get the word discipline, the discipline to follow the teaching of his teacher.

One doesn't make a decision to become a disciple. A disciple is a found one who is called to discipleship. You don't choose a rabbi, a rabbi chooses you to be his pupil. "Finding Philip, Jesus said to him, "Follow me." Philip didn't find Jesus. He wouldn't have known who he was looking for or where to look. And he certainly wouldn't have looked for a carpenter's son from Nazareth. Jesus found Philip. Discipleship is all what Jesus' doing not mans' doings. He takes the initiative. He seeks Philip in Galilee and chooses you here.

"Follow me," Jesus says. Those are disciple-making words from the mouth of Jesus into the ears of Philip. Jesus' words are Spirit and truth. They are words that enlivened, open ears to hear, loosen tongues to sing, raise the dead, and cause feet to follow. "Follow me," Jesus said to the fishermen on the shores of Galilee. And Peter and Andrew, James and John followed Him. "Follow me," He said to Levi in his tax collector's office and Matthew followed Him. "Follow me," He said to Philip when He found him in Galilee. "Follow me," He says to you in your Baptism.

The call to follow is a costly call. It cost Jesus His life to issue it. To follow Jesus to is to die to one's self in Jesus' death. ***"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."*** To follow Jesus is to be nailed to His cross with Him, to die in His death, and so to follow Him through death and resurrection to eternal life. Did Philip fully understand that? Probably not! But he followed anyway. Believing is not about understanding. Believing is trust. To follow Jesus is to trust Him with your whole life and with your whole death.

The first thing Philip did was to find his friend Nathanael and tell him. ***"We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law and about whom the prophets also wrote – Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."*** Philip is so excited that he gets things backward. Philip didn't find Jesus. Jesus found Philip. But there would be plenty of time to straighten Philip out. The important thing is that he told his friend the same day he became a disciple. And what's more, he did it without any special training, without any workshops, seminars, or a programmed approach. Solely out of the joy of having met Jesus.

It's what we call "evangelism." But if you were to ask Philip what he was doing, he would say he was telling his friend Nathanael the exciting news of having met the Messiah. Philip wasn't engaged in an activity. He was simply doing what anyone does when something exciting happens. You tell someone else.

I've shared this idea before and it is worth repeating. I believe, there are two words we ought to eliminate from our vocabulary for no other reason than they aren't used in Scripture the way we use them: evangelism and stewardship. We ought to declare a no usage period in the church for the words "evangelism"

and “stewardship.” Don’t use them for a few years. Declare a ban on methods, programs, videos, workshops, three-ring binders all dealing with evangelism and stewardship. It seems the more attention you pay to them, the more you talk about them, the less of either one there seems to happen.

We tend to bureaucratize, organize and institutionalize. We make the church into a professional institution modeled after the organizational structures of the business world, with trained “professional staff” that are expected to run and organize the show. I cringe every time I hear the term “professional church worker.” Professionals do what they do for hire. Amateurs do it out of love.

Outreach, in an institutionalized view of the church, it’s like a pyramid scheme where every member is expected to sell the organization to the outsiders. If every member brings in two more new members, the group grows and profits. One occasionally hears of churches, some Lutheran by name, who put their members on an annual outreach quota like a group of salespeople.

A church that has this institutionalized mentality relies on methods, principles and programs. This wayward assumption is that the Gospel can’t be trusted to do its work, that the Holy Spirit is inept without your help. It promotes the idea that you the baptized priesthood of all believers, are not competent to declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light without some type of program, script, or plan. Or that this is something that is best left for the so-called “experts” – that is the evangelism committee or the clergy.

It’s as if we need to put God on a leash. Organize and plan around so-called biblical principles, and God will bless our organizing and planning with success. I’m not saying that the church doesn’t need some organization. Of course, the church still sends out missionaries and congregations probably ought to have some way to communicate with visitors and make sure the community knows that everyone is welcome. But no amount of organizing and no amount of planning is going to make Jesus more effective at being Jesus. And our motivation for outreach is not for the survival of the institution but for the soul of every person for whom Christ died. In the end, outreach is no more than one person telling another about who Jesus is and what he has done for the world. It is Andrew telling his brother Peter, it’s Philip telling his friend Nathanael and it’s each of us telling those whom the Lord has placed around us.

We overcomplicate things. Jesus finds Philip, and Philip goes off to Bethsaida and finds Nathanael and says: *“We found the one written about in Moses and the prophets. His name is Jesus of Nazareth, Come and see!”*

Nathanael is a skeptic. *“Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”* Nathanael comes from Galilee. This is his local bias. The point is that Nazareth was not the place from which you might expect the Messiah. Moses and the prophets didn’t point there. There was even a popular saying in Jesus’ time that said, *“Out of Galilee arises no prophet”* (John 7:52). And even if a prophet were to come from Galilee, he wouldn’t be from the town of Nazareth. That Jesus was known as the carpenter’s son from Nazareth didn’t make Him any more marketable in a country where background and location meant everything.

Our Lord hides His glory behind the ordinary and the weak things of the world – a virgin mother, a manger, Nazareth, the cross. Power and glory don’t point the way to the Lord. Nor do prosperity and popularity give sure-fire signs of His presence. Not all churches grow on account of the Gospel, either.

We are tempted to compensate for such weakness, to cover the cross, to hold out another Jesus, shaped to the cultural needs of the community. But then that wouldn’t be the true Jesus of Scripture and only the true Jesus saves. What we have are His spoken and written Word, the water of His Baptism, the humble yet Holy Supper of His Body and Blood in - with and under, the bread and wine. And like Nathanael, the world is just as likely to be skeptical. *“Can anything good come out of that?”*

“Come and see,” says Philip. He doesn’t just give Nathanael information about Jesus. He invites Nathanael to come and see Jesus for himself. Don’t take my word for it. Come and see for yourself. Faith isn’t

formed under fig trees, but in a personal encounter with Jesus in His presence. Faith comes by hearing the word of Christ, not by persuasive proofs, emotional manipulation, engaging arguments or personal testimonials. When the Samaritan woman by the well returned to her town, she told everyone about Jesus. The townspeople went out to see Jesus to hear for themselves. Those that believed came back saying, ***“We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world”*** (John 4:42).

Only Jesus can make disciples. Our task is to tell people who Jesus is and to invite them to “come and see”, to bring them into contact with Jesus, to lead them to where Jesus is: forgiving sins, baptizing, teaching, preaching, feeding His people, to lead others to where we ourselves have been led – to the preached and written Word, to the font, to the altar and pulpit, to the word of forgiveness spoken in the name of Jesus.

To “come and see” Jesus, as Nathanael discovered, is to be seen by Jesus as we really are. ***“Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit”***, which Jesus said to Nathanael. Jesus meets Nathanael’s skepticism with his own view of things. “Look. A straight-up, genuine Israelite who tells it like it is.” There’s no point in hiding anything from Jesus, nor is there a reason. He is here to forgive, not condemn. Nathanael is surprised at Jesus’ knowledge. ***“How do you know me?”*** And Jesus replies, ***“I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you.”***

Remember that it was Philip who had brought Nathanael to Jesus from Bethsaida. Jesus wasn’t there under the fig tree in Bethsaida when Philip told Nathanael about Jesus. But He didn’t need to be. He’s the Lord. Before Philip had said a word to Nathanael, Jesus had already seen him. Jesus’ having seen him is what brought Philip to Nathanael in the first place. Jesus arranged all the pieces of the puzzle so that Nathanael could be brought to Him through His instrument Philip.

And so it is for us all. Some of us were brought to Jesus when just a few weeks old when we were baptized, just as people brought little children to Jesus to have him bless them during his earthly ministry. Some of us were brought to Jesus by a friend, a member of our family, a co-worker, perhaps even by a stranger who said to us “come and see.” Someone played Philip to our Nathanael. And we have been Philips for other Nathanaels, though we might not have even known it.

Hearing Jesus, Nathanael also believes and confesses. ***“Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel.”*** Those are weighty titles. Not the kinds of titles tossed about casually by a “true Israelite in whom there is no deceit.” Nathanael was not the type to butter people up with words. Remember, ***“Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”*** You bet it can. The Son of God, the King of Israel.

Jesus says, “You think that’s something? You haven’t seen anything yet!” ***“Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”*** There’s always more to Jesus than meets the eye. The eye sees a man from Nazareth, a carpenter’s son. But faith sees and confesses Him to be the Son of God, King of Israel. Jesus is the only One who makes peace between God and man, for He alone is the God-man, the eternal Word in human Flesh who made His dwelling among us. He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world by giving His life in our place, the Victorious Victim, who conquered death by dying and who lives and reigns to make His victory our victory. He gives it to us as a free gift.

We encounter the same Jesus in His Word, His Baptism, and His Supper. Greater things than Philip or Nathanael could have imagined that day in Galilee we see and hear each Sunday. Who would have guessed that two thousand years later, men and women would be gathered in places as remote from Galilee as here in Salem Oregon to have their sins forgiven in the name of Jesus? To hear His Word? To eat and drink the bread and wine which is His very body and blood?

We then tell others and invite them to “come and see” what we have seen. ***“Taste and see that the Lord is good.”*** We keep on telling and inviting, even when we are met with skepticism or even outright cynicism and

rejection. We do so not to promote an organization or for the survival of the institution, or because we need people to fill the pews, or because the budget needs more contributions.

We tell others for the simple reason that Jesus died for all and therefore all must hear it and be invited to “come and see” for themselves. Like Philip, we do it out of the sheer joy of knowing Jesus by faith and having heard His gracious call to follow. We do it because this morning’s Introit is also becomes our own prayer: *I do not hide your deliverance with in my heart; I have spoken of your faithfulness and salvation. O’ Lord may this be the desire of our hearts to invite all to come and see. For only in you is there salvation. Thank you for the free gift of eternal life, In Jesus name, amen and amen.*

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. AMEN