

A Sermon for the Second Sunday after the Epiphany
January 17, 2021
The Rev. Robin Teasley

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 about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth." Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, "Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!" Nathanael asked him, "Where did you get to know me?" Jesus answered, "I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you." Nathanael replied, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" Jesus answered, "Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these." And he said to him, "Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man." John 1:43-51

In this season after the Epiphany Jesus will show us, reveal to us, who he is, and what it means to follow him. Although we focus on Mark's gospel this year, today we make a brief excursion into John's gospel, perhaps to deepen our understanding of what it looks like to follow Jesus, to be a disciple.

In the fourth gospel, Jesus doesn't spend any time in the wilderness; his ministry begins at his baptism. In the verses that precede our reading today, when Jesus sees that some of John the Baptizer's disciples are following him, he turns and the very first words he speaks are, "what are you looking for?"

The Baptizer's disciples must have been totally surprised by this question, because they didn't even answer Jesus. Instead, they blurt out, "Rabbi, where are you staying?" But Jesus responds to them saying, "Come and see," and they follow him to where he's staying.

The next day Jesus decides to go to Galilee and there he finds Philip. But when Jesus finds Philip, he doesn't tell him what he must believe, how many Samaritans or tax collectors he will get to know, how many thousands of people he's going to feed, or how many sick and lame he will cure. He simply says, "follow me." The job description is to follow Jesus; all the rest is other duties as assigned.

This invitation to follow, to come and see, is a theme throughout John's gospel. We know that Philip followed and spent some quality time with Jesus, and the next thing we hear is that Philip tells his friend Nathanael about Jesus. But Nathanael had not yet spent any time with Jesus or experienced Jesus, and as a result, he was more skeptical. Nathanael was skeptical because he was well-versed in the scriptures and knew what the prophets had predicted about the coming of the Messiah; he was certain he knew how to interpret the scriptures.

Philip knew that what Nathanael really needed was to be in the presence of Jesus, to experience Jesus for himself in community with other followers. And so, rather than trying to pressure him into seeing a new possibility by explaining or by arguing with him, Philip simply said, "come and see."

When Nathanael meets Jesus, he is astounded at all that Jesus already knows about him. Jesus knows what he is like and where he has been. Finding himself in the presence of the One who knows him inside and out, better than he knows himself even, Nathaniel can only confess what he now knows to be the truth – “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!”

Some of us can clearly remember when and where and how we became followers, and some of us don't know the exact moment our relationship with Jesus began. Our call, our conversion, has been something that takes place slowly, almost imperceptibly, over time.

No matter when our relationship begins, we are called not only in that moment, but throughout our lives to deepen our relationship with Christ. We are also called into relationship with one another. This is what creates the Body of Christ. Being in community, being part of the Body of Christ, isn't passive, it's active because God keeps on calling us to follow, to try new things, to face new challenges, and experience new growth.

As we noted in our renewal of baptismal vows last week, we are daily called to look for epiphanies or manifestations of Christ. We are called to continue in the Apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in the prayers. We are called to repent and return to the Lord when we fall into sin. We are called to proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ as we seek and serve Christ in all persons. And we are called to strive for justice and peace and to respect the dignity of all people. These are words on the pages of our Book of Common Prayer, but they are more than just words.

These words, these vows made at our baptism, challenge us to be open to seeing new ways to answer God's call, to think about new ways to invite others to “come and see”. I would offer that they also challenge us to think about new ways to be the Church in a changing world.

There are many things in this world we might choose to follow. Things like Facebook, Twitter, or the daily newsfeed. Following the opinions and politics of others does not guarantee new life or even truth. In fact, all too often, it brings the opposite.

As disciples we are called to follow Jesus and proclaim the gospel truth. The pandemic has been a challenge to our discipleship, but we are responding by sharing the good news in new ways. Our worship livestream had over one hundred views last week. We are offering online Sunday school for our children, thanks to our members sharing their time and talent, and we are studying scripture together on Zoom. Come and see these new ways of being the church.

Philip easily shared his experience of Christ with Nathaniel by simply extending an invitation. We can do this, even in a pandemic, sharing with others, with family, neighbors, and coworkers where we see Christ being revealed. We can express our sincere interest in their challenges, offering kind words and prayers, and helping as we are able. This is what it looks like when disciples give of our time, talent and treasure.

People in great need are looking for hope in these trying times. As we live out our baptismal vows, Christ will be revealed, the words of scripture will become lived experience, and our baptismal vows will be so much more than words on a page.

Trust that as Jesus knew Nathanael, so he knows and loves us, and is calling us to follow.

Amen.