

King of Glory Lutheran Church
January 16/17, 2021
Year B: 2nd Sunday After Epiphany: John 1:43-51
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John 1:43-51

⁴³ The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." ⁴⁴ Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. ⁴⁵ 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." ⁴⁶ Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." ⁴⁷ When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, "Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!" ⁴⁸ Nathanael asked him, "Where did you get to know me?" Jesus answered, "I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you." ⁴⁹ Nathanael replied, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" ⁵⁰ Jesus answered, "Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these." ⁵¹ 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."

I have a truly terrible, actually nonexistent, sense of direction. Anyone who has ever been in a car with me knows this. I'm not kidding. It is possible for me to get lost in my own neighborhood. Knowing that, you will understand that when I first got my drivers license and for many years that followed I had to figure out where I was going without the help of google maps and cell phones. So I liked to follow another driver in another car to my destination if at all possible. And it would routinely happen that I would be following a friend and I would lose them before we got where we were going. They would get far ahead or turn when I wasn't paying attention or worst of all, I would start following a car that looked like theirs but was in fact, someone I didn't know at all.

You see the problem right? When you lose sight of the person you are following or follow the wrong person you can get seriously lost. And this does not only happen to people like me with a bad sense of direction. It happens to us all in life from time to time. Sometimes when we follow people we follow the wrong people, or we get lost or we end up going in a direction we never intended to go.

Who we follow has always been an important question for us to ask as individuals and as a community. But I think in these days of a global pandemic, of economic inequality and devastation, of the continued struggle for justice and human rights, of the transition of political leaders and violence in our streets and in our Capitol building the question of who we follow is what God has given us to wrestle with today.

Who do you follow?

Today in our readings we hear the story of Samuel who is called by God. And Samuel follows God's voice and God's call.

And in our gospel reading we hear one of the stories of Jesus calling his disciples. He calls Philip and Nathaniel to be his disciples and join him.

Follow me, Jesus says. He says this over and over again throughout the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Today we hear Jesus say this to Philip in the gospel of John. And then Philip shares the good news with his friend Nathaniel.

Philip had been waiting and watching for Jesus. Waiting for a leader, a teacher, a savior. After Jesus finds Philip he goes to Nathaniel and says, "We've found the One Moses wrote of in the Law, the One preached by the prophets. It's Jesus, Joseph's son, the one from Nazareth!" (*The Message*)

"Nazareth? You've got to be kidding," Nathaniel says. (*The Message*)

Nathaniel was a bit of a skeptic. From under his fig tree he had seen it all. Hanging out there under the fig tree in his town, teaching and studying, catching up on the latest news, sometimes just people watching. Nathaniel knew enough, had seen enough to be pretty skeptical. From his comfortable spot under that tree he's seen a lot of people go by, heard a lot of ideas, and a lot of talk.

So on this particular day when his buddy Philip stops by Nathaniel questions the news he brings. Philip has just encountered Jesus and been invited to follow him. And in his excitement Philip goes and finds Nathaniel and tells him about Jesus. And when faced with Nathaniel's skepticism and his reluctance to follow Philip tells his friend, "Come, see for yourself." (*The Message*)

Come and see. Philip doesn't make any outrageous promises, he doesn't offer proof or a logical argument about who Jesus is. He simply says, come and see.

This is a call that echoes throughout the gospels. People young and old, women and men, rich and poor, sick and healthy...all kinds of people are invited to come and see Jesus and then follow him.

They are invited to come and see Jesus forgive sinners, heal the sick, feed the hungry and offer compassion to those who are suffering and have lost hope.

At the very beginning of Jesus' ministry the invitation to follow is extended. "Come and see," Jesus says to Andrew just a few verses before our gospel reading today in verse 39.

And then Andrew goes to his brother Simon and tells him that he has found the Messiah and brings Simon to Jesus.

Next Jesus meets Philip and says to him, "Follow me."

And then Philip's invitation to Nathaniel, "Come and see."

It is Nathaniel, the skeptic, who is moved to see Jesus because of Philip's witness and invitation.

"Come and see," Philip says to Nathaniel. And he does. Nathaniel gets up from his comfortable spot under the fig tree and goes to see Jesus.

But before Nathaniel can even be introduced, Jesus calls out to him a welcome, a greeting of recognition. "There's a real Israelite, not a false bone in his body." (*The Message*) Jesus knew who Nathaniel was even before they met.

"Where did you get that idea? You don't know me," Nathaniel said. (*The Message*)

But Nathaniel was wrong, because Jesus knew him and knew him well.

And it is in this moment of recognition, when Nathaniel realizes that he is known by Jesus, that Nathaniel sees who Jesus is, the Son of God. When Nathaniel goes to see Jesus for himself, he comes to know who Jesus is and the good news that Jesus brings. And Nathaniel follows Jesus.

Jesus says to Nathaniel, I know you. And Nathaniel doesn't need to hear anything else. The beginning of this relationship between Nathaniel and Jesus is an experience like no other. Nathaniel meets Jesus and Jesus calls him by name and promises that he is about to do a new thing.

We hear these call stories today as Jesus invites the disciples to follow him. Following Jesus, as we know from the first disciples, is not easy. There are always questions, doubts, and definitely some skepticism from time to time.

But that is why God's Word comes to us today. This gospel, this good news, this message is shared for us to hear and know. For those of us who are waiting and watching and those who are skeptical and those who feel hopeless.

We too, like those first disciples are invited to come and see. To come and see Jesus, the one who knows you and invites you to follow him. No fancy advertising or promised riches or tricks or gimmicks.

Jesus calls to you today saying come and see for yourself the One who knows you, the one who loves you, the one you have been waiting to follow.

Too often we get caught up in following people or things or ideas that take us in the wrong direction. When we follow what leads to hate, greed, violence, power or fear we have lost our way.

Today Jesus meets us where we are, finds us in our confusion or pain or grief and he says to you and to me, follow me. I love you. Follow me, follow the way of love, mercy, forgiveness and peace. Follow me and feed the hungry, clothe the naked, love your enemy, visit the sick, welcome the stranger.

And as followers of Jesus we have an incredibly important job to do. Nathaniel met Jesus and followed him because of Philip's invitation to come and see. You and I are called not only to follow Jesus but to share his invitation with our neighbors. We are called to invite people to come and see who Jesus is and what it means to walk with Jesus and know his love.

The good news God gives us this day is that we are not lost. We are known and loved and called by name. Called to follow Jesus. Called to follow him in words and actions, in joy and sorrow, in service and compassion, and always in love.

This day remember who you are, a beloved child of God. And always remember who you follow, Jesus, the One sent to save us and show us the Way.

Amen.