

January 14, 2017
John 1:42-51

Epiphany 2
Vicar Jason Ashby

“Come and See”

In our gospel reading this morning, we find Jesus already deeply engaged in the work of calling disciples.

And while there are many gospel accounts about Jesus calling disciples, each with its own instruction to impart;

As a whole, these stories have something important to reveal to us about how it is that our own call to follow Jesus is awakened within us.

Just this week I had the opportunity to teach our confirmation class, and our subject matter was the second article of the Apostles Creed. I believe in Jesus Christ, Gods only Son our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit....

And as I did so, it dawned on me how strange and unusual these things must seem that we are asking them to believe.

These things that each of us here as Christ’s church confess to be true, and that I myself, confess to believe with all my heart with all my soul.

And so, I felt the need to explain to them that these things that we talk about, about being born of the Holy Spirit, about God having suffered as we suffer, about a God who suffers when we suffer, and about death in this life not as an end, but as an essential threshold over which we cross into something good and new.

That these beliefs are not things that any of us just simply decided to wake up and believe one day, but that they are in fact eternal truths about God, and about the world, and about ourselves that we have come to believe.

And while at first, it’s the reliable witness and testimony of others that opens our minds to the possibility of Jesus Christ.

In time, it is through our own experiences, and above all through an awareness of God’s presence in our lives, that our faith begins to grow.

And it’s a pattern of coming to believe that we can observe in John’s gospel today.

John the Baptist first tell Apostle Andrew, later to become the Apostle Andrew, that this Jesus in their midst is in fact the Lamb of God.

Andrew then hears for himself the invitation from Jesus, to follow Him, to come and see. And it is in following Jesus that Andrew then comes to believe.

He then goes, and he tells his brother Simon Peter, “we have found the Messiah”, and then he too, begins to walk with Christ.

In our reading today from John's Gospel, we hear about a man named Philip who also becomes a follower of Jesus and later an Apostle. And in his first act of following, he goes to a man named Nathaniel.

And he tells Nathaniel, as Andrew told Simon Peter, "we have found the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth son of Joseph, the one foretold by Moses and the Prophets".

But Nathaniel isn't quite so quick to as Simon Peter was to drink the Kool-Aid. He's skeptical, so he says to Philip, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth"?

And while this question may sound a bit sarcastic and even rude. We can understand where it's coming from.

It's not that there was anything wrong with Nazareth, it's just that it was a small little town that not many people knew. There's was no temple there, it's no great centre of learning, and frankly there just wasn't a whole lot known to be going in or coming out of that town.

And so, its hard for Nathaniel to believe that God's promised Messiah would arise from such a place.

And if we put ourselves in Nathaniel's shoes, I think it's easy for us to imagine how strange this all must have sounded.

Imagine for example the person sitting next to you in church this morning, had leaned over before the service started and said to you:

Ahem. I want you to know that I've found the Messiah, his name is Bob and he's from Millbank. Now technically he's the son of a guy there named Joe, but I also happen to know that he's actually the Son of God, the one foretold by Moses and the Prophets.

And so, we can see how this sort of talk might be a little difficult for Nathaniel to believe.

And Philip seems to recognize this difficulty, and so he tells Nathaniel the only thing he can, "Come and See".

Now perhaps Nathaniel decided to humour Philip, or maybe he was just curious, but what I think, is that he gives Philip the benefit of the doubt because he knows Philip.

And so, Nathaniel decides to go along with Philip and take a look. But as they approach, it is Jesus who then begins to interact with Nathaniel directly saying:

"Now here is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit".

Many scholars consider this to be Jesus making some kind of a play on words, but to me it is more reminiscent of how Jesus uses irony to invoke self-reflection on the part of His listener.

Like when he says to those gathered to stone the adulteress, "let those who are without sin cast the first stone". It causes them to reflect, Am I really without sin.

And for Nathaniel I believe it induced that same moment of reflection, Am I really without guile, Am I really without deceit?

And so, Nathaniel asks Him, "How do you know me?".

Jesus says, "I saw you under the fig tree".

And at that moment, Nathaniel then confesses that he is in the presence of the Son of God.

Now it seems to me that there is something remarkable that's happened here. Something that must account for Nathaniel's sudden conviction that he's in the presence of God's only Son our Lord.

Otherwise there is a sort of incongruence between this Nathanael who only moments ago is skeptical and quick to dismiss Jesus as anything more than a man from Nazareth.

And then the next minute, is a person entirely convinced that this must be the Son of God. Even Jesus asks him, "Do you believe, just because I told you that I saw you under a fig tree?"

And yet, I don't believe Jesus asks him this question, simply because he's surprised about Nathaniel's sudden change of heart.

Instead, Jesus wants Nathaniel to realize for himself that this belief that he's come to, that Jesus is the Messiah, God's Holy presence among us, is not something that we can come to believe through rational means alone.

It's not something we can simply be told one day, and then suddenly be expected to completely grasp onto. Because it is through faith that we come to believe.

And it's often a fragile faith; planted by that unexplainable, but undeniable presence of something greater than ourselves at work in our lives. It's a presence that stirs us, and speaks to us through texts, and through people, and through the little signs we notice along the way.

A presence drawing us unexpectedly into the lives of others. Strengthening us and encouraging, to trust and forgive those who we would not trust and those who we could not forgive.

It is the presence of Jesus that we feel. The one who steps into our lives to assure us that we are not alone, and we are each known to him by name. It is this presence, His presence, that draws us to follow, and draws us to believe.

Jesus calls out to Nathaniel and Nathaniel responds.

And while for Nathaniel it is a small act of trust, it is an act which forms the rudiment of faith, and the first steps toward a new life of discipleship.

"Follow Me". "Come and See".

It is the great invitation, and it's an invitation to be shared, with our families like Andrew did with Simon Peter, and our friends and neighbours, like Philip did with Nathanael.

And it is an invitation that Jesus extends again to each of us here today. "Follow Me", "Come and See". For it is by following our Lord, that we will come to see who Jesus truly is, and who we truly are through him. Amen.