

Second Sunday After Epiphany
January 17, 2021
Sermon by Rev. Zachary W. Johnson
Hill Avenue Grace Lutheran Church
Pasadena, California

Gospel: John 1:43-51

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

SERMON by Pastor Zachary Johnson

Our gospel reading this morning lays out exactly what John believes it means to be a disciple of Jesus. To be a disciple of Jesus one must experience being in relationship with Jesus and then witness to others to "come and see" what relationship with Jesus is like. After all, the most important thing John conveys through his gospel is that being in relationship with Jesus is what gives us life and makes us God's beloved. Being in relationship with Jesus is being in relationship with God, for Jesus and God are one.

Just a few verses earlier in the Gospel of John, two people are with John the baptizer. One of the people with John the baptizer is identified as Andrew, the brother of Peter. When John the baptizer sees Jesus walking by, he witnesses to Andrew and the other person with them, saying "Look, here is the Lamb of God!" (Jn 1:36). Immediately Andrew and the other unidentified person with him run to Jesus and ask him, "Rabbi, where are you abiding?" Jesus' reply to them is an invitation into relationship: "Come and see."

Now, the word *see* in the original biblical Greek means to perceive, to understand with one's sight, but also to experience/become aware of with one's own senses. So, when Jesus invites Andrew and the other person to "come and see," he is inviting them to come and experience through their senses what it is like to be in relationship with him.



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What Jesus did through his earthly ministry, his death and resurrection, as well as his ascension was to make it possible for all of us to be in loving relationship with God the creator, Jesus the savior, and the Holy Spirit our advocator. The chasm that was created by human sinfulness that separated us from God has been mended by Jesus, so that we are now free to be in loving relationship with God.

By abiding with Jesus, Andrew got to experience this amazing and loving relationship first-hand. It filled his whole being with such love that Andrew couldn't wait to find his brother and share this amazing love with him. So Andrew finds his brother Peter and invites Peter to come and experience being in loving relationship with Jesus. But Andrew's relationship with Jesus has opened his mind to know that Jesus just isn't some random, cool guy, but the Messiah. So, when Andrew invites Peter it is also with the understanding that Jesus is the long awaited for Messiah.

Being in loving relationship with Jesus does indeed expand our understanding of who Jesus is and the nature of God. The more time we take to be in loving relationship with Jesus—through worship, Bible study, prayer, and meditation—the more will come to understand why God loves us, which in return will grow our love for God. But, like any relationship, it takes time and energy on our part to be present in our relationship with God. Thankfully, the benefits we receive from being in relationship with God are so wonderful that we will begin to want to spend more of our time each day with God.

Now, we have reached the part of John's story that is our gospel text for this morning. Philip and Nathaniel are two people who are devoted to studying the scriptures. They know about the long-awaited messiah who is proclaimed by Moses and the prophets.

Jesus finds Philip first and invites him to be in loving relationship. What is interesting here is the fact that Philip is compelled to follow Jesus by just looking at him. Philip doesn't ask for an explanation of who Jesus is, nor does he question why he should follow Jesus. Phillip just feels a compelling desire to follow Jesus. Perhaps it is love at first sight?

However, after experiencing the loving relationship that Jesus offers, Philip is also opened to the understanding that Jesus is the long-awaited for Messiah. Philip is so filled with joy and hope that he immediately goes and finds Nathaniel. Now, Nathaniel is not so convinced at first. He knows the scriptures allude to the fact that no prophet shall come out of Nazareth, hence why he makes the statement "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"

Yet Philip is determined to share this loving relationship with Nathaniel that he tells him to "Come and see," the same invitation that was given by Jesus to Andrew and the mystery disciple.

Nathaniel then goes with Philip to meet Jesus, and when he does Jesus informs Nathaniel that he is an "Israelite in whom there is no deceit." This opens up Nathaniel's heart, for is it possible that Jesus already knows him so intimately? Wanting to believe it was true, Nathaniel then asks Jesus "Where did you get to know me?" To this Jesus admits to Nathaniel that he foresaw him sitting under the fig tree. Now this



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admission truly opens up Nathaniel's heart to the point where he fully accepts Jesus as the "Son of God! The king of Israel!"

At these words from Nathaniel, Jesus takes his followers into a deeper place of meaning where he informs them that they will witness greater things, for they will come to see that Jesus is that one whom the angels will descend and ascend upon him; they will come to perceive that Jesus is not the king of Israel, but the new Israel. In other words, Jesus is the new promised land where all can gather and experience the love of God.

This tells us that a loving relationship with Jesus isn't limited to one location here on earth. It lets us know that Jesus isn't just found in the sanctuaries of our churches, but out in the world. Jesus is found not only in our homes, but also in those areas where the homeless gather. Jesus isn't just found among Christians, but also in every person that we encounter each day. Jesus is not only found among the wealthy, but also among the poor, the forsaken, and the outcast. Jesus is found in the loving relationship that we have with him but also with all others. Everywhere there is the possibility to be in relationship with someone whom we meet in daily life, Jesus can be found.

But sometimes that means that Jesus will send us to invite others into loving relationship whom we may not be fully comfortable with being around. Since Jesus can be found in whom society would consider as lowly, poor, outcast, and forsaken, Jesus will call us to invite them to come and see. Thankfully, being in loving relationship brings us so much life and joy, we will feel compelled to share this love with others, even if they make us feel uncomfortable. For Jesus will point out their sacredness to us as we build relationship with them. After all, to be a disciple of Jesus is to be in loving relationship with him and all of God's beloved, as well as to invite all others to "Come and see."

Amen.



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