



Epiphany 2-January 17, 2021

Baltic and East Nidaros Parish

John 1:43-51

“Finding Disciples”

-Sermon by Pastor Randall J. Questad

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from his son, Jesus Christ. Amen

During Confirmation class this past Wednesday, I asked the students if they knew what the word Epiphany means. I had hoped to get the answer “to be revealed” or “to make known” or “to manifest”. But one student responded with even a better answer. She said, “It is like when a light switches on in your head.” She further explained it is when something becomes very clear for you to see that wasn’t before. Last week on the first Sunday after Epiphany, the Baptism of Our Lord Sunday, we were made to see clearly the importance of our baptism as Jesus himself was baptized by John in the Jordan River. On this second Sunday in Epiphany, Jesus is flipping on the lights in the heads of some of the first people he finds and calls to be his disciples.

The calling of disciples can seem like a game of hide and seek. It can sound confusing when we hear these stories of seeking and finding. It can be easy for us to fall into the trap and believe we are the seekers and to become a follower or disciple of Jesus, it is up to us to find Jesus. This problem of who is seeking and who is finding is not new. As you just heard in the reading from John, after Philip found Nathanael, he told him, “We have found Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth.” The “we” indicates that others must have been involved in this search for Jesus which refers to what happened on the previous day. This gospel records that on the previous day before it was Andrew who became the first disciple of Jesus and Andrew then found his brother Simon Peter and told him “We have found the Messiah.” As you can see, even the first disciples wanted to lay claim that they were the seekers who found Jesus was in hiding.

However, it becomes clear that throughout scripture, it is the Triune God who is truly the seeker. Without being drawn to him, we would rather hide from him than go looking for him. When Adam and Eve first doubted God’s word in the Garden of Eden, they did not go running to God to confess their sin. Instead, they hid, and it was God who went looking for them. Abraham did not listen to God at first that he would be blessed through his wife Sarah. Abraham ran from God and chose his own path. But once again, God sent angels to find him and remind him of the promise he had made in the beginning. A promise that would be fulfilled regardless of Abraham’s resistance. The boy Samuel in the first reading for today was not looking for God even though he was ministering to the Lord in the temple. The light bulb didn’t come on the first time the Lord called Samuel. Samuel thought it was the voice of Eli calling him. The Lord called three more times before the light came on and Samuel responded to the epiphany that it was the Lord who was standing before him and calling and finally responded as Eli had instructed him, “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.” The Psalm for today clearly describes that God knew you while you are still being formed in your mother’s womb. The Lord always knows you before you think you have found him.

When Philip told Nathanael that he had found Jesus from Nazareth, Nathanael replied, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Nathanael’s response sounds a bit snarky. It sounds like Nathanael questions if this man who Philip saw the Messiah was truly. This is when Philip responds back to Nathanael with the three simplest words for you to remember when you encounter someone who needs an invitation to a place where they will be found by Jesus. Philip said, “Come and see.” Philip didn’t argue with Nathanael or make a case to defend his encounter with Jesus. Philip had already been called by Jesus and he knew that when you are called

by Jesus, he doesn't give you a choice in the calling. Instead, Jesus removes your options, and you will follow, even if you need to be called more than once like boy Samuel.

Nathanael did as Philip suggested and went and saw Jesus. Nathanael asks Jesus a great question. "Where did you get to know me?" Other translations say, "How did you get to know me?" Where seems to be a good first word for Nathanael's question, since Jesus describes a specific place. Jesus said, "I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you." Jesus removed any credit that Philip might have taken for "leading Nathanael to Jesus". Jesus could have quoted the Psalmist and said that before I saw you under the fig tree, but I knew you first when you were being formed in your mother's womb. Some biblical scholars suggest that Jesus called Nathanael because sitting under fig trees was a sign of someone who meditates, and it was this trait that Jesus was looking for in a disciple that day. I don't place a great deal significance on sitting under fig trees as a prerequisite for becoming a disciple of Jesus since this is not where Jesus found the fishermen who became disciples or I doubt that many of you were sitting under any kind of a tree meditating this morning before the Holy Spirit directed you to Jesus today.

Philip was not the first person or the last to speak the inviting phrase "Come and see." These words were first spoken by Jesus himself on the previous day when Andrew and Peter became disciples of Jesus. It was when Andrew and Peter who were first disciples of John the Baptist were directed by John toward Jesus when he said, "Look, here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." Immediately, Andrew and Peter left John the Baptist and followed Jesus. When Jesus noticed these two were following him, he asked them, "What are you looking for?" They didn't say they were looking for Jesus, but responded, "Where are you staying?" Jesus didn't question this odd response. Instead, Jesus said to Andrew and Peter as Philip said to Nathanael, "Come and see." Like Nathanael, the first two disciples would discover who Jesus is by going to a specific place and listening to him speak.

In the fourth chapter of John, Jesus finds the woman of Samaria drawing water and asks her for a drink of water from the well. This woman is surprised that Jesus is speaking to a foreign woman. Then Jesus reveals to the woman that he knows everything about her even though she thinks this is their first meeting. When the woman of Samaria tells others her story, they doubt her story. Without a word of debate or defense from her for Jesus, she simply directs them to Jesus by saying, "Come and see a man who has told me everything that I have done."

Today we have heard how the light bulb came on in different ways, times, and places for Samuel, Andrew, Peter, Philip, Nathanael, and for the woman of Samaria. These people experienced a unique epiphany when they were found by Jesus. These stories may leave you wondering, "What about me?" Or maybe you might ask the same question that Nathanael asked, "Where did you get to know me?" Like all of these examples of followers or disciples that were found by Jesus, Jesus knew you before you knew him. Jesus knew you when you were in your mother's womb. Jesus found you again in the waters of baptism. Jesus finds you in the sacrament of Holy Communion and gives himself to you. And Jesus has found you today by hearing his word preached to you. The seeking is over. You have been found and you know what to say to invite someone else to know that they too have been found by Jesus. "Come and See" Amen.