

Sermon

Epiphany 2 Year B

1 Samuel 3:1

Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the Lord under Eli. The word of the Lord was rare in those days; visions were not widespread.

John 1:43-51

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."

Prayer:

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Sermon:

Today we heard Jesus say to Phillip, "Follow me".

And Philip followed.

When Philip hunts down his buddy Nathaniel,

And tells him about Jesus,

Nathanael cynically says,

"Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" OUCH.

That kind of thing sometimes happened to me,

When I travelled to court in San Francisco or LA.

They liked our fresh fruit,

But they wanted us to stay in our place.

I'd invite them to come grab some Basque food with me.

"Come and see," I'd say.

"Come and See" said Philip.

The Gospels are full of word play.

They did that a lot back then, just like we do today. ⁱ

So, when Jesus says to Nathanael,

"Here's an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!",

he was being clever.

"Israel" is another name for "Jacob" and

Jacob means "leg-puller,"

as in, "Are you pulling my leg?"

So, in a strange way Jesus has said to Nathanael,
“Hey, I know you. You’re the real deal. You’re no goofball.”
“You’re just the kind of guy I’ve been looking for!”

Jesus pinned Nathaniel down without even knowing him.
That’s why Nathanael asked Jesus,
“Where did you get to know me?”

And Jesus says, with more word play:
“I saw you under the fig tree, before Philip called you.”

Most of us imagine that Eve bit into an apple,
So the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil
was an apple tree.

But, in Jesus’ world folks thought it were a fig tree.
People who studied scripture were “gathering figs.”
Figuring out good from evil.
So Jesus had seen Nathanael studying the law.

And he to Nathanael:
“I’m a fig gatherer, and you’re a fig gatherer.”
You’re smart. You’re skeptical. And so am I.

Jesus knew Nathaniel’s heart, just like he knows ours.

We are precious. Jesus knows us.
His Father knows the number of hairs on our heads. ⁱⁱ

“Come and see,” Philip said. ⁱⁱⁱ “Come and see,” said Jesus.
God knows us, and God longs for us to know Him. ^{iv}

So, our Gospel is the story of a loving God's intervention,
in what we call the real world.

God sent His Son to intervene, to inaugurate the Kingdom.
And we desperately need that intervention!

We are refinancing our house.

Over the years of paying bills, I've learned a few things:

- You're never alone. People do care about you.
If you doubt that, try missing a couple of payments.
- In these Covid days,
Bills travel through the mail at twice the speed of checks.
- For every action, there is an equal and opposite criticism.

Whether Eve bit an apple or she bit a fig,
We all live outside the Garden. And sometimes it's tough.
Experience is a hard teacher.

Life doesn't always meet our expectations.
And we are tempted to lower our expectations.
But that isn't Jesus' way.

Jesus came to heal us of our skepticism,
To cure us of our frustration, and our loneliness.

Why not say "Yes", to Jesus,
And let the healing begin!

"Come, Follow me", Jesus says. "Where are we going?", we ask.
"To My Kingdom"^v, he says. And he adds, "*bring others.*"^{vi}

We've lost the Garden.

But we've not lost Our Lord.

We are exiled to the real world, but the kingdom of God is at hand.

Jesus calls us in from exile? *All of us.*

And we are to call in everyone around us.

We can't save the world but we can help save our family,
our neighborhood, our school, and our town. ^{vii}

We offer what we have, and we do what we can.

Once two old neighborhood friends met, in downtown Austin.
They hadn't seen each other in years.

One guy had two college degrees, but he was struggling with
student loan debt. He drove an old car and rented an apartment.

The other guy had dropped out of school, but had a ton of money.

The poor friend asked the other, "How'd you do that?"

The rich one said, "Well ... one day I randomly opened a King
James Bible. I dropped my finger on a word, and the word was "oil".
So, I invested in oil, and I made a fortune, when the government
gave up on nuclear."

Then he said, "On another day, I dropped my finger on the word
"gold". So, I invested in gold, right when the stock market crashed
in 2008, and I made a mint."

So, hopeful for a word from The Lord, they poor drove his beater car
back to his apartment, grabbed his King James Bible, and dropped

his finger on some random word on some random page. He prayed for a second, and then opened his eyes, looking for God's wisdom.

He read ... "Chapter 7".^{viii}

Where will life in Christ take us?

Wherever God wants.

Each of us is called to help build the Kingdom...

one person at a time

Even in a world of McMansions and incestuous leaders,
riding on the back of each new generation.

The Son has been born. He calls us!

Come follow me. Come and see.

See what my Kingdom brings to you! Come follow me.

-AMEN

ⁱ Especially in the original Kline Greek.

ⁱⁱ Well, I make that a little easier than others. Never mind counting my hairs! I should ask him where they went!

ⁱⁱⁱ God invites us to come and see for ourselves what immersion in God's Way means for us.

^{iv} "Come Follow me" Jesus said. And they did. And so are we.

^v What is the "Kingdom of God"? What did Jesus mean? For most 1st century Jews, with Messianic expectations, the image was of the return from exile, the defeat of Israel's national enemies and the restoration of a Davidic Kingdom ... all basking in the Glory of The Lord. Is that what Jesus meant to inaugurate? I think No, not in those worldly terms.

^{vi} Like the early Christians, our job is to invite others to Come and See.

^{vii} When Jesus spoke about the “people” he often used a word that meant “mob” - - Sinners and outcasts. The worlds impoverished, and disinherited losers. Through his focus on the poor and the outcast; Jesus tells us that they are our primary point of entry into the Kingdom. The Kingdom is at hand, when we begin our work there, with them.

^{viii} Too bad about that guy. I’d recommend the NIV or the NRSV!