

Church of the Divine Love

Sermon Sunday January 17, 2021

I Samuel 3:1-10 (11-20); Psalm 139:1-5, 12-17; 1 Corinthians 6: 12-20; John 1: 43-51

Sisters and brothers in Christ,

Have you ever tried a product or purchased an item because someone has recommended it to you? Have you ever gone to a restaurant recommended by a friend? Are you more likely to try something recommended by someone you know or by a stranger or a salesperson? Normally we are more likely to follow the recommendation from someone we know and trust, right?

At the beginning of our story today, we once again see John. He's not in the story very long, however. As the story opens, he's with two of his disciples. While standing there he sees Jesus walking by. The first thing John does is what he's been doing all along, drawing our attention to who Jesus is. Once again, he proclaims in a loud voice, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!" So, what do these disciples of John do? They leave John and go after Jesus! What follows is the Gospel of John's account of Jesus and his first disciples. And there are three things in particular this passage teaches us about discipleship and following Jesus.

John's disciples don't start following Jesus blindly, they've heard John's testimony. When they leave John to follow Jesus, they do so because of what John has said. John has led them to consider Jesus. They had probably been with John and heard his teaching for a while, and now they were following up on his teaching by turning to follow Jesus. So, think about this. The two men who went after Jesus at the beginning of our story did so because someone they knew and trusted recommended Jesus. This is true of other people in our story too. One of John's two disciples to follow Jesus was Andrew and our passage deliberately points out that the first thing he did was find Simon, his brother. The first person he went talk about Jesus was his brother. Simon would become Peter, a major leader of the early church! Would Simon have been as willing to consider getting to know Jesus without the witness of his brother Andrew?

And there is yet a third example. After meeting Jesus and turning to follow him, Philip goes and gets Nathanael. Our story doesn't tell us that they were brothers or what relationship they had, but we can probably be fairly sure that they were at least friends, the narrative indicates that Philip sought Nathanael out to introduce him to Jesus. Nathanael is initially hesitant, even scornful of Jesus because of where he is from. But eventually he does accept Philip's invitation. Does he accept because Jesus is from Nazareth or because his friend Philip, whom he trusts, has invited him? The "come and see" invitation is echoed when Philip goes and gets Nathanael. He says "come and see" to Nathanael when he expresses his doubts about where Jesus comes from. Just like Jesus said to Andrew and the other disciple, Philip says to Nathanael, "Come and see for yourself. Meet him yourself and decide."

One key thing the story draws our attention to, therefore, is this: the importance of considering Jesus. This means being willing to investigate, to ask, and consider who Jesus is. Each of us is

asked to consider Jesus personally. While the invitation to consider Jesus comes from others, it is our decision to follow him. The Gospel of John invites us to ask: What is Jesus about? Why would I want to follow him? Why should I? It is a repeating theme of Scripture, too, that God calls unlikely people, from unlikely places, to do remarkable things. The boy Samuel, still just a child, was serving as a page in the Temple when he was called by the Lord to take a hard message to his mentor. Who would think to ask a young child to tell his aged and revered master that his sons have been condemned for blasphemy? As our Psalm celebrates, God knows us intimately and watches over us, behind and before, from the moment we are conceived and for every day of our lives. God knows our worth, and God calls us into ministry. Everyone has a job in God's economy.

Jesus says, Follow me. No rules, no entrance tests, no hierarchies, but simply follow. Go where I go. Do what I do. Love whom I love. Feed, heal, reconcile, transform. This is discipleship. This is how we do church. Each of us is called into a vocation of community and service, and no prior experience is required, just acceptance that we are deeply loved by our Creator, that each of us is holy and precious in God's sight, and that there is meaningful work for each of us to undertake, no matter how young or old we are, no matter where we come from. Philip invites Nathanael to come and see. It's a simple invitation that we too can employ when we invite others. It is our job, the job of the leader of the church, to equip you and encourage you in discerning that calling, just as the old priest Eli understood that it was his job in his twilight years to guide and form the young Samuel in his prophetic ministry.

At the deepest level our Nazareth are about our understanding of God. We just can't see how anything good can come out of Nazareth. We just can't see how anything good can from out of Nazareth. We cannot believe that God could be present, active, and revealed in Nazareth whether it be another person, a relationship or situation, or our own life. It's so hard to see life in the midst of death, hope in places of despair, and the good and beautiful in what looks like the bad and ugly. It's sometimes easier to assume. For us Nazareth is a blind spot. For God, however, Nazareth is the place of God's manifestation and self-revelation. Our Nazareth become the place of God's epiphany.

Over and over Jesus shows up from the Nazareth of our life and calls us out from under the fig tree. Whenever we leave the fig tree, we open ourselves to see God present and at work in the most unexpected places and people. As the assumptions fall a new life and a new world arise. The fulfillment of God's promises and earthly life happen in Nazareth. The last place we would have thought that possible is the first place God chooses. Come and see. Our salvation and healing happen where we thought nothing good could happen. Reconciliation and love are revealed in relationships we were certain nothing good could come from. The seemingly hopeless situations of life begin to bear fruit. Words of forgiveness and compassion are spoken by people we were sure could never say such things. God puts lives back together in Nazareth. There is more happening in Nazareth than we ever thought possible. You see, not just "anything good" comes out of Nazareth. The One who is Good comes out of Nazareth. **Amen!**