

Philip & Nathaniel

John 1:43-51

Jan 17, 2021

We are in the middle of the Epiphany. It is a season we remember and celebrate the revelation of Jesus, God in flesh in our midst. Last Sunday we celebrated the Baptism of the Lord and remembered our baptism. Today, we read about Jesus calling his disciples. Calling his disciples was the second important thing he did as he began his earthly ministry.

We wonder why he invited people to join his ministry in this world. Isn't he almighty and omnipotent? Isn't he able to do all things as soon as and as much as he can whenever he like? Yes, that is true. But it is also true that he decided to invite people to join him doing the ministry in this world. Apostle Paul is right when he says, we are God's co-workers. God wants us to be part of God's works for the world and in the world.

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John 1:43 says, "The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Peter and Andrew. He must be a fisherman like Peter and Andrew. After calling Peter and his brother Andrew, Jesus found Philip and asked him to be part of Jesus' earthly ministry, which some name as Jesus' movement.

Pay attention what happened on the way to Galilee. Jesus found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." Do you notice that Philip did not find Jesus and the other way around? Jesus found Philip and asked him to follow him.

Likewise, we are found by Jesus. You know how and when and where you were found by Jesus. It is God's providential grace that we are invited to be part of Jesus' movement in this 21st century. By God's grace, we heard about Jesus and encountered him and accepted him as our Lord and Savior. By God's grace, we have been joining the ministry and mission of Jesus Christ here at Fairfield Grace. By God's grace, we are blessed and privileged to take part in Jesus' movement as Jesus' disciples. What a joy and what a blessing it is! So we raise our voices, saying, "Hallelujah! Amen!"

What did Philip do after being found by Jesus? What did he do after being invited by Jesus to follow him? ‘The very first thing Philip did was to find Nathanael and tell him of this Jesus whom he had found, rather who had found him. Can you see Philip’s shining face to greet Nathaniel? He told Nathanael with a sense of joy and excitement, “Hey, Nathaniel, we have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth.”

Nathanael was skeptical. He wondered whether anything good could come from the little hick town of Nazareth. Philip did not argue, he merely said, “Come and see.” (John 1:45-46) Philip knew for sure that Christ is not found at the end of an argument, but in personal experience. So the best he could do was simply, “Come and see!” How wise he was.

John Wesley, the founder of Methodist Movement said in the 18th century: “I offered them Christ.” That is what we can do. We offer them Christ and the rest is up to them—and to God. Yes, the best we can do in our day is “Come and see”

The word “apostle” means “someone sent with a message to deliver.” We do say “Paul the Apostle, John the Apostle, Peter the Apostle, etc.” because they are sent to the world with good news to deliver. That is the mission not only of the early Jesus’ followers, but of all of us.

The minister glared down at Joe Smith and roared, “And are you, my son, a soldier in the army of the Lord?” Surprised at being singled out, Smith replied anxiously, “Y-yes sir, I am.” “Then why,” pressed the clergyman, “do we see you here only at Christmas?” Thinking quickly, Smith replied, “Would you believe, sir, I’m in the Secret Service?” Are we not in the Secret Service?

In a survey of twenty-two congregations in three major cities, newcomers were asked, “What brought you to this church?” The responses: 2%, an advertisement; 6%, an invitation by the pastor; 6% an organized evangelistic outreach program; and 86%, an invitation by a friend or family member. That is more than four out of five.

One man came out of his house on his way to church on Sunday morning just as his neighbor came out with his golf clubs. “Hey, Henry,” the neighbor called, “Come play golf with me.” The man said, “Sorry, it’s Sunday, and Sunday means church.” After a moment’s silence, the golfer quietly said, “You know, Henry, I’ve often wondered about

your church and what you have been enjoying there. You know I always invite you to play golf with me, but you have never invited me to go to church with you."

In a Gallup survey, almost three out of five of the unchurched say that they would "definitely" or "probably" or "possibly" return to the church life and ministry. And all of those numbers have held consistent in recent years. What they need might be our personal invitation to Christ. That is why Philip, the third disciple, is a very important apostle for us to know and imitate.

We are found by Jesus to call others. We are invited by Christ to invite our FRANs, Friends, Relatives, Associates and Neighbors, to Christ.

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The fourth disciple Jesus invited to follow is Nathaniel.

Nathaniel is mentioned only twice in the Bible, and then, only in the Gospel of John. Matthew, Mark, and Luke never talk about him. They do talk about Bartholomew in the places where John talks about Nathaniel. Since John never mentions Bartholomew, our best guess is that the two are the same person.

What we do know about Nathaniel is that he was a person who was hoping and searching. We know it because of the fig tree. At a time when people lived in one-room houses, we know that they often planted fig trees in front of their homes as a place to "get away to."

A fig tree is about fifteen feet tall and its branches spread out about 25 feet in width like an umbrella, creating a space that is almost like a private room. If someone wanted to get away from the chaos of a one-room house, he or she would sit under the fig tree. They would sit there to read scripture or to reflect or to pray. Sitting under a fig tree was a sign of seeking and praying and meditating. Now, I realize that our church community life looks like sitting under a fig tree. We have come together weekly in this unique way due to Covid-19, with the yearning to know the touch of the living God. We, as a faith community take time away from the chaos of the world around us to read scripture, reflect, and pray. We are like Nathaniel. Aren't we?

In addition, Nathaniel was a man "in whom there was no deceit." (John 1:47) In modern English, that means he was a person who sought to be decent and sincere. He was neither a prominent nor an influential person, but he was a good and average person

who tried to be good and responsible. I think that describes you and me. Don't you think so? I know you are good people. I know I am not that bad. I know that you are concerned about and care for the world in which we live. Me, too.

I know we are a diverse people with widely differing ideas about how things in life should be accomplished. I know that we often argue openly and vigorously our different political views and standings. Regardless of our ideas and opinions, our motives however are genuine. I could easily apply the description of Nathaniel to you and me: "persons in whom there is no deceit."

What does Jesus' calling of Nathaniel have to do with Fairfield Grace? Jesus who called Nathaniel, ordinary person to Jesus' movement, is calling ordinary people like you and me to be part of God's ministry in the world.

How often we are tempted to discount the ordinary? I've heard the comment many times. "I'm only one person. What good can I do?" How discouraging and how untrue. We, ordinary people matter. You matter. Your voice matters. Your works matter. Your ministry matters. Your prayer matters. Your giving matters. Your presence matters. Yes, your life matters. You make a difference. We, ordinary people do make a difference.

Lee DeVecchio, our Lay Leader says, "We are small but mighty." She is right. I say this morning, "We are small but essential."

Let us remember, our concerns, hopes, and efforts are heard by God and God answers at the right time God chooses. Let us remember, too, the prayers of "ordinary people" - - your prayers and my prayers -- are used by God to bring peace, justice, and healing to a world beset by turmoil and conflict, whether it is here in this country or on the other side of the world. Yes, it is through the ordinary like you and me that God's will is ultimately accomplished in this world.

Philip and Nathaniel! Thank YOU for you and your role in Jesus' movement in the 1st century.

Fairfield Grace the Apostle! Let us invite our FRANS to Christ, simply saying, "Come and See!" Let us accept Jesus' invitation to follow today and participate at Jesus' movement in the 21st century for the transformation of the world. Amen. Amen.