

*Epiphany 2 (2024)*

*1:43-51*

*Pastor Ed Harkey  
Keene, NH*

*John*

*TLC,*

*“When the Savior Calls”*

*“And [Jesus] said to [us all], ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.’”*

**Introduction**

I once read that “the best sermons will grow out of ... [the] spot where Christology and discipleship come together.” (Smith, *Feasting on the Word (B)*, 1:261)

What this means is that our lives as the followers of Jesus are not only about coming *to*, and learning the language *of* faith, but also putting that faith into practice. Doing faith does not contribute to our salvation, but it is evidence of it. We grow in our discipleship not just being Mary’s (sitting at Jesus’ feet), but also by being Martha’s (serving others in Jesus’ name).

**Main Thought:** Let us rejoice ... both in our own call to faith by grace in Christ, and with that same joy, seek to live it out in Jesus’ name. Amen.

+++

It is without question that Christians learn to speak about Jesus as He pours Himself into us through His Word and Sacraments. I cherish the study of His Word and worship for this reason. Yet, we grow as disciples not only when we are fed with forgiveness and grace; we grow as disciples by doing forgiveness and grace, by being engaged in living out our faith – glorifying God, *and* serving others.

So, how has this congregation – Trinity – done that? I’d like to celebrate a few of those ways this morning. [Next week – Lutheran School’s Sunday – we’ll hear specifically about the school]. But I envision the mission of Trinity to be larger than that. We are a gifted congregation, well-resourced and equipped, well-pastored and led. The Holy Spirit has put us here, to be a people in mission.

So, how has *this* church tried to follow Jesus – in its programs, its prayers, and in the life of its members outside these walls? How has Trinity learned to speak the Gospel along the way? (Adapted from Smith, 265)

[PRESENTATION # 1 – Jason: food baskets to the students of Keene State]

## THE SAVIOR'S CALL IS A GRACIOUS CALL

**43** *The next day* (as God's vision of a new creation, even now, unfolds before our eyes) ***Jesus decided*** (that is, He firmly resolved) ***to go to Galilee. He found Philip*** (not vice versa) ***and said to him, "Follow*** ("be ever following") ***me.***<sup>1</sup> **44** *Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. 45 Philip found Nathanael* ("gift of God") ***and said to him, "We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."***<sup>2</sup>

This is a theological blueprint for being a people in mission:

- ✚ Jesus' "resolve" -> mission doesn't happen by chance ... there is intentionality ... directionality ... purpose!
- ✚ Before there is a "Here am I, send me, send me," there is a Savior set about to call those He would call and equip; before we find Jesus, He has found us.
- ✚ There is power in presence ... of Christ ... His Word, but also in those whom He sends forth in His name; they are, like Nathanael, "gifts of God."

In the economy of God's grace, He gifts us with grace, and then invites us by His means of grace to grow that grace. It is a beautiful proposition!

The Savior's call is a gracious call, and ...

## THE SAVIOR'S CALL IS AN ONGOING/REPEATED CALL

**46** *Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see."*

---

<sup>1</sup> Present imperative, indicating continuous action; words "filled with compassion, irresistible compassion" (Beck, *CPR*, 10:1, 30).

<sup>2</sup> Note that in the Greek, "we have found" follows "of him of whom ..." We only "find" after the One we are looking for is revealed. (Rockemann, *CJ*, October 2002, 462)

Our call to discipleship is not just a onesie, but a continual revisiting the well for direction and strength ... as it sure as we may have to visit and revisit those to whom we are called. Freely given to, we freely give ... creating the space where God can do, and most certainly does His holy work.

That is to say, we do not have to have a Nicene Creed like theological conversation to invite someone into a conversation with Jesus, but rather, simply be at the right place at the right time, issuing forth nothing more than a “*come and see*,” and then, placing those invited into the loving arms of the Savior.

[PRESENTATION # 2 – Miriam/In Team: letters to the principals of SAU 29]

**47 Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and** (peering into his heart and soul and putting Nathanael’s faith on display<sup>3</sup>) **said of him, “Behold, an Israelite** (“one who has fought with God and prevailed”<sup>4</sup>) **indeed, in whom there is no deceit** (the “anti-Jacob”<sup>5</sup>)!”

**48 Nathanael said to him, “How do you know** (that is, from personal experience or insight) **me?” Jesus answered him, “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you** (in a Psalm 139 sort of way<sup>6</sup>).” **49 Nathanael answered him, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!”**

How is it that Nathanael comes to such a confession of Christ? I mean, Jesus has done nothing – by way of miracles, signs or wonders – to evoke such a response.

It is nothing but the Word that informs such a response, embodied for Nathanael in the One standing before him. It is Jesus’ sheer presence and Word that draw both he and Philip to Himself, a relationship that remains until the day they die.

---

<sup>3</sup> *Sermon Studies on the Gospels* (B), 78

<sup>4</sup> The meaning of “Israel” (see Genesis 32:22-32)

<sup>5</sup> Von Hagel, *CPR*, 16:1, 32

<sup>6</sup> The where or when of this incident a mystery; though how profound the thought that it may be been when Nathanael was a child, and his mother, like other mothers, would place him and their children under the fig tree for shade, while they worked in the fields. Depending on Nathanael’s age, Jesus may have seen Nathanael before Jesus Himself was born!

“Sitting under a fig tree often meant times spent in a place for prayer and reflection. Fig trees were also often symbols of Israel dwelling in safety and abundance with God. See Isaiah 36:16; Micah 4:4; and Zechariah 3:10.” (Stone, *CPR*, 28:1, 28)

There will be a time for words. Simple presence, and a warm breakfast will not get someone into the kingdom.<sup>7</sup> But that's not what we are called to. The Holy Spirit does that. We are but a vessel through whom that Spirit flows. Where, if the Savior's call is a gracious one, and it is repeated time and again by His disciples ...

## THE SAVIOR'S CALL WILL BRING ABOUT A RESPONSE

*50 Jesus answered him, "Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these." 51 And he said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you (all ya'll) will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."<sup>8</sup>*

[PRESENTATION # 3 – Ted: the Christmas prayer]

- ✚ “True faith is never satisfied to rest on what one has already discovered, but continues to grow through new discoveries in one's life with Christ.”(SSoG, 79)
- ✚ “[Discipleship] is not obedience to an abstract set of codes, but consent to a costly, joyful relationship. In walking with Jesus, we learn who he is. As we learn who he is, we learn what it means to follow him.” (Smith, 265)

Where, two other blessed truths arise to encourage us and this congregation in our ongoing mission as the Lord's graced, called and sent disciples (Adapted from Brown, *Feasting on the Word (B)*, 1:262):

- ✚ God can (and does) accomplish great things in unlikely places;
- ✚ God can (and does) use ordinary people to accomplish those things in unlikely places. Not the least of which is you, child of God, you!

*Amen.*

---

<sup>7</sup> Let the disciple take note that “witnessing invites, it does not argue or coerce, and certainly does not cartoon or discredit Nathanael's initial doubt. Faith sickens and dies in an atmosphere where doubt is laughed at.” (Craddock, et. al. *Preaching through the Christian Year (B)*, 81)

<sup>8</sup> Jesus is this “ladder,” “the conjunction of time and eternity ... the place where the heavens are opened and the divine glory can be contemplated. Similarly Nathanael as the guileless Jacob, the true Israelite, is the prototype of a new humanity reborn in Christ.” (Barrett, *Feasting on the Word (B)*, 1:264)

[Friday E-mail:] “Who am I?” It’s not just a question one might pause to ponder on his or her 63<sup>rd</sup> birthday ... but a question asked at other times in our lives, esp. when we’ve come through a time of upheaval or profound change. Where, I suspect you’ve asked that question yourself a time or two in your own life.

Probably not unlike Jesus’ disciples Philip and Nathanael, the focus of my sermon for this Sunday from **John 1:43-51**. Where, the disciple’s identity comes in their direct relationship to Jesus Himself, issuing forth in an invitation to follow, worship and confess Him. Where, before we find Jesus, He has long set His eyes on us – before we’re borne says Psalm 139. Yes, before we know or name God, God knows and names us; where, even more miraculous and mind-blowing is that God knows you so well, and *still*, by His grace, calls and sets you apart for His holy purposes.

Again, it’s a thought I’m sure each of Jesus’ disciples came to. Where, in leaving all that was once familiar, they embarked on a journey, forsaking their entire social and cultural milieu, all to follow someone they barely knew. They were ostracized by many, seen as lunatics by others. They endured hardships a plenty, again, outside of the safe confines of what they once knew. Imagine their shock and awe when Jesus turned to them and said: *“Truly, truly, you (all) will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”*

It is to such a purpose and identity that God calls each of us ... to cast our eyes upon Jesus from whom our identity – individually and as a congregation – flows. “The glory of God, and, as our only means to glorifying Him, the salvation of human souls, is the real business of life,” C. S. Lewis once wrote; where in fulfilling that mission we get to behold some of life’s most profound moments of joy when we heed that call. Wherein, God has uniquely created/recreated us – each a “divine original” ... taking even the worst of us and conforming it to His holy purposes.

Where, whatever you may spiritually discern about your identity, that identity is “rooted not in the things we say about ourselves or the labels others assign us, but in the One who knows us more deeply and more lovingly than we could ever know ourselves.” Yes, “the value of our lives ... comes from the God who knows and names us, from whose steadfast love nothing in all creation can ever separate us.”

Where, at the end of their journey, I’m fairly certain each of the disciples felt fulfilled; where, being fully known – Jesus said to them as to us *still*, “Welcome, child of God, I’m sure glad to have you along for the ride.” SYOS

## Study of John 1:35-51

### Open:

1. When you get really good news, who is the first person you share it with? Why?

Read John 1:35-51.

### Dig:

2. Observations, ruminations, reflections, a-ha’s?
3. What do we learn about John the Baptist? [His role is pointing others to Jesus – “the Lamb of God”] Andrew? [“the bringer” – bringing others to Christ] Simon Peter? [now “Rocky”!] Philip? [Another “bringer”]? Nathanael? [lit. a “gift of God,” perhaps a bit too provincial, but “a true Israelite (an anti-Jacob), one in whom there is no guile”]
4. With what appears to be little knowledge of who Jesus is, what motivates these disciples to follow Jesus? [Nothing but the word – or the Word!]
5. Of the five people in vv. 35-48 (four who are named, with the other possibly being the author of this Gospel), how was the contact made for each one? How does each respond to the testimony he hears?
6. What might this say for how we are called to witness to Jesus? [A beautiful model for witnessing arises: 1) It’s all about relationships – built over time by spending time with others; 2) A heartfelt invitation is crucial – something of which we should not be afraid as ours is not to expound deep theological truths, but simply to invite others to “come and see”; 3) Let Jesus & His Word do the heavy lifting, giving the growth (1 Cor 3:6-7); and 4) Be open to the different ways in which Jesus might be inviting someone into a relationship with Him]

7. In the end, what does this text teach us about Jesus? And what else might the Holy Spirit want us to know or to believe? Why?

**Reflect:**

8. What was your motive initially for following Jesus? What circumstances led you to do so? Why do you follow Him still?
9. Having prayerfully received and explored this text, what might the Holy Spirit be leading you to do this week? Why might He want you to do it?