

EPIPHANY 2 B**“Journey With Jesus: ‘Come, See and Follow’”****John 1:43-51**

Among the many reasons we refrain from sharing our faith in Jesus with others is our natural self-skepticism. We do not think that we have the ability to tell others about Jesus. Perhaps the way we live our lives has been a poor advertisement for Him. We think that we do not talk smoothly enough to tell others about God. We are afraid that our lack of Biblical knowledge will embarrass us. Perhaps our grasp of Christian theology is weak and will only confuse others. So we hold back on witnessing Christ to others. Our poor image of our spiritual selves keeps us from revealing who Jesus is to those who are around us.

But a perfect life, smooth speech and a high spiritual IQ are not necessary when it comes to sharing Jesus with others. We see that in our text from Philip. When challenged about Jesus by the skeptical Nathanael, Philip gives him a simple invitation, “Come and see.” It is not our job to make Jesus into the Savior. It is not our responsibility to prove Him as the Lord. He will take care of that Himself. Our privilege, calling and yes, duty, is to extend the invitation to others, “Come and see Jesus in His Word and Sacraments,” “Come and see Jesus active in my life,” and “Come and see Jesus present among us, His people, in Christian worship.” Then having seen Jesus at work for themselves, they will hear His gracious invitation to them, “Follow Me.”

I. Doubt Asks: “Can Anything Good Come From...?”

Nathanael has a good reason to be skeptical of Philip’s lofty claims. Jesus comes from Nazareth. Nobody who is anybody ever comes from Nazareth. Nathanael is from Cana, just four miles from Nazareth, he knows it well. Nazareth was never mentioned in the Old Testament or in any other important Jewish writings. It is a small, off the beaten path village, a wide spot in the road, a don’t blink or you’ll miss it kind of place. Nazareth is where you move away from when you are able to, not a place you brag about being from. Feel free to insert your own

idea of such a place from our area. Nazareth is not a happening place. It certainly has never been associated with a person as important as God's promised Savior.

But Nathanael's skepticism is nothing more than our own natural, sinful response to God's work through His Son living in our human flesh, Jesus the Christ. A baby born in a stable and laid in a manger, can anything good come from such a humble birth? A child raised as a carpenter's apprentice, can anything good come from such a simple man? A teacher followed by fishermen and a doer of miracles, can anything good come from such a carnival showman? A criminal executed upon a cross, can anything good come from one who is dead and buried?

What's more, the gifts of God's grace that Jesus has left for us receive similar sneers of skepticism from our human nature. Words written long ago in a faraway place, can anything good for our lives come from the pages of the old Bible? A little water poured on a person's head a few times, can anything good for our lives come from this act called baptism? A little bit of bread and small sip of wine, can anything good for our lives come from this simple snack called holy communion? In many ways we not only encounter, but we share, the same type of skepticism that Nathanael displays and that Philip faces when they speak with one another about Jesus.

II. We Invite: "Come and See"

Notice, though, that Philip does not argue with Nathanael about Jesus. Nor does he walk away from him mad. Philip does not call Nathanael any negative names. He certainly does not give up on Nathanael because of his skepticism. Instead, Philip gives Nathanael a simple invitation, "come and see." This is a practice employed today by companies that are confident of their product. They offer us a 30-day money-back guarantee. If we try their product and are not satisfied with it, we can return it in a month and have the entire purchase price refunded to us. These business people feel that what they offer will sell itself and that once we, the customers, try the product, we will agree that it works for us and will want to keep what we have bought.

So also is our confidence when it comes to Jesus. We do not have to sell Him to others as our Savior. We do not have to convince others that He is the Christ. We just need to offer His love and mercy to those around us in our words and in our works. We know that Jesus, by means of His Word and Sacraments, will do a fine job of selling Himself to those who need and try out His gifts of forgiveness, new life and eternal salvation.

III. Jesus Invites: “Follow Me”

We are familiar with the words of life-changing events. “Will you marry me?” “You’re hired/fired!” “I do” “It’s a boy/girl” or “You just won ten million dollars in the sweepstakes” (ok, maybe not familiar with those words). Notice the simple, life-changing words that Jesus speaks to Philip in our text, “Follow Me.” This invitation is unusual for that time. Those who sought a religious teacher would choose the rabbi they wanted to study with, somewhat like high school seniors today choose the colleges they want to attend. But Jesus does it the other way around. He selects the people He wants to instruct as students. These guys Jesus picks are not the usual suspects. They are not men who are planning to make ministry their career. The disciples Jesus chooses all have jobs, families, homes and a different future in mind than what Jesus is offering to them. Yet all of that changes with Jesus’ simple command to them, “Follow Me.”

Have we heard Jesus speak these words to us? Have we experienced this radical, life-changing event? Yes, we have! It happened to us in the water and word of Holy Baptism. Instead of letting us remain a hell-bound child of this sinful world, Jesus claimed us as His own, covered us with His holiness, placed His saving name upon us, and made us citizens of the kingdom of heaven. Jesus repeats His invitation of “Follow Me” and gives us directions for this journey in His Word of the Holy Bible. Jesus also nourishes us for a life of discipleship by giving us His very own body and blood in the Lord’s Supper for the forgiveness of our sins.

IV. Jesus Promises: “You Will See”

In this passage Jesus quickly overcomes Nathanael's prejudice against His hometown of Nazareth. With a little exercise in His divine all-knowingness Jesus wipes out Nathanael's skepticism. "An Israelite in whom there is no deceit." Nathanael wonders how Jesus seems to know him. "I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you." "Wow, Teacher, You are the Son of God, You are the King of Israel" is Nathanael's immediate and confident confession of Christ. Jesus' response is "you ain't seen nothin' yet; stick with Me and you will see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man." This is a reference to Jacob's ladder of Genesis 28 when he left home to avoid the deadly anger of his brother Esau. God gave Jacob a dream of a ladder, or stairway, from heaven to earth with angels going up and down on it.

Jesus, the eternal Son of God, came into our human flesh to be that miraculous connection between God and us. In Jesus the gulf of sin that separates heaven and earth is bridged, In Jesus our God has come down to us. In Jesus our God lifts us up to Himself. "Stairway to Heaven" by the band Led Zeppelin is called one of the best songs of the 20th century. But the only stairway to heaven is Jesus Christ. By way of His cross our God reconciles us to Himself and sets us on a journey with Jesus which is our eternal life.

Can anything good come from Jesus of Nazareth? "Come and see for yourself" is the invitation that we give to others. Come and see Him in the Bible. Come and see Him in His baptized people. Come and see Him present with us in worship. We see in Jesus our loving God who has sacrificed Himself in our place upon the cross and is now risen from the dead. Jesus promises us that we will see even greater things than these. We will see heaven open to us and there we will be with Him, with His angels and with all His faithful people. AMEN