
⁴³ The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, 'Follow Me.' ⁴⁴ Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. ⁴⁵ 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.' ⁴⁶ Nathanael said to him, 'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?' Philip said to him, 'Come and see.' From John 1:43-51 (NRSV)

Have you ever had the experience of looking for something, but not being able to find it – and the more desperately you looked the 'lost' these item seemed? Finally, in desperation, you ask someone else to help... and immediately they say, "Here it is!" How do you feel? Frustrated...? Foolish...? Relieved...? There are times in my life when, upon realise I cannot find something, instead of continuing the 'frantic search', I ask my wife to help. I get 'the look' as she knows she will immediately find it. But I sometimes cannot be bothered with the 'frantic search'...

How do you feel when something is 'lost'? How do you feel when those whom you hold in your heart seem to be 'lost in life'? How do you respond to Jesus call to 'seek and save the lost'? (cf. Matthew 28:18-20)

In today's Gospel we have the account of Jesus' calling of two more disciples.

Notice that the passage again begins with "The next day...". We are now in Day Four of this Week that begins John's gospel. We are told that Jesus now goes to Galilee, the province in the north where he will do much of His work. Up to this He had been further south on the banks of the Jordan River where John the Baptist had been baptising.

Jesus came across Philip and called him to be a disciple: "Follow Me." Later in the Gospel Philip will be pictured as a rather straightforward person. During the feeding of the crowds, Jesus asks Philip, "Where will we get enough food for these people to eat?" (John 6: 5). Later, at the Last Supper, as Jesus speaks about his Father, Philip says: "Master, show us the Father and that will be enough for us" (John 14:8).

We do not know what else happened between Jesus and Philip but, like Andrew, the new disciple was immediately fired to go and find Nathanael. He tells Nathanael two things about Jesus: first, that He is the One written about by Moses and the prophets, and second, that He is the son of Joseph from Nazareth. Nathanael is not very impressed. "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" Later, the leaders of the Jews will discount Jesus because of His origins, or what they believe to be His origins. It is something we can sometimes be tempted to do with people we meet.

Philip's response is perfect: "Come and see." It was the same answer that Jesus gave to the two disciples who asked where He stayed. We get to know Jesus by hearing His voice, reading His Word, and following Him. Which is ultimately about a truly personal encounter with Him – hence Philip's word to Nathanael...

When Jesus sees Nathanael, He says: "Here is a true Israelite. There is no duplicity in him." The first person to be called "Israel" in the Hebrew Testament was Jacob (Genesis 32:29) but he was guilty of serious duplicity. He cheated his older brother Esau of his birthright (cf. Genesis 27:35-36). There can hardly be higher praise given a person than to say they are free of duplicity. Integrity is a very high virtue.

Nathanael is obviously surprised: "How do you know me?" "Before Philip called you, I saw you under the fig tree." The full meaning of this escapes us but it deeply impressed Nathanael. In the Hebrew Testament the fig tree was seen as a symbol of messianic peace. In the book of the prophet Micah we read: "Every man shall sit under his own vine or under his own fig tree undisturbed" (Micah 4:4). In speaking words of assurance to Joshua the High Priest, an angel of the Lord concludes with the words: "On that day you will invite one another under your vines and fig trees" (Zechariah 3:10).

These words of Jesus are enough for Nathanael to make an extraordinary profession of faith: "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel." The title "Son of God" was used in the Hebrew Testament as an adopted name for the Davidic King (2 Samuel 7:14; Ps 2:7; 89:27) and "King of Israel" is used here with a messianic sense. For John, of course, "Son of God" also implies the divinity of Jesus.

Right at the start of the story, John says: "Jesus found Philip". If you go to any book shop and look in the spirituality section, you will find autobiographies of people who have devoted themselves to the spiritual life through the years. And very often, they write about how they spent many years seeking out a spiritual leader to follow. But that is not the same for us as Christians: that is not even an option because, as John says, "Jesus found Philip". The truth at the heart of the Christian story is not that you and I have found Christ, but Christ has found us.

Sinners are lost until God finds them. The biblical description of those who do not know Jesus Christ is not "unsaved," but lost. Paul describes the former condition of his Gentile readers: "You were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world" (Eph. 2:12).

Jesus first tells the parable of the lost sheep. A lost sheep in the Judean wilderness was doomed. It had no protection and it would be only a short time before the coyotes or other predators would attack and kill it. A lost dog might eventually find its way home, but a lost sheep is unable to do so. As such, it is

a picture of a lost sinner. The sinner may not even know that he is lost and headed for destruction, but that is the truth. Even if he becomes aware of his condition, there is nothing he can do about it. Jesus said that no one can come to Him unless the Father draws him (John 6:44, 65). Paul says that “the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ” (2 Cor. 4:4). But, thank God, He has intervened!

Jesus shows us that God goes to great effort to seek lost sinners. The shepherd leaves his 99 other sheep and goes after the lost one. The woman who lost her coin sets aside all her other work and diligently searches until she finds it. Jesus is the Good Shepherd, and His mission is “to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10).

Note.... God takes the initiative in seeking sinners. Both the shepherd and the woman realised the problem and took the initiative to deal with it. The lost sheep and the lost coin were passive in the process. The only reason they were found is that the shepherd and the woman initiated a diligent search for them. Scripture is clear we are saved because the Lord took the initiative; we did not. That initiative springs out of His great love and compassion. As the apostle Paul states, “He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world.” “In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will” (Eph. 1:4, 5). “God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8).

If salvation had been left up to us, we would still be in our sins. But God lovingly took the initiative. God did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all (Rom. 8:32). Jesus did not selfishly cling to the glory and beauty and comfort of heaven, but He laid aside His rights and came to this earth, not as the mighty King to judge sinners, but as the lowly servant to give His life a ransom for many (Mark 10:45).

As we rejoice in ‘being found’ by God, this will lead to many areas. But an important one for us is to seek to ‘remain in Christ’. Jesus said, Remain in Me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in Me.” John 15:4

Apart from Christ we can do nothing! Just like a branch that has been cut off from the vine cannot bear fruit – neither can we. Just like the branch, we would wither and die. As we know the branch gets its nourishment from the tree or vine. We have been grafted into the vine by Jesus. It is vital to remain grafted into the vine and receive the nourishment from the vine, to grow and produce the fruit we were designed to produce. We rejoice in the gift of God’s Word and sacrament. We feed on Christ in worshipping together with other Christians. We rejoice in the devotional life we may live (cf. Growing Faith at Home).

We rejoice in God's call to live as faithful members of His community, knowing that we have been grafted together with other people in the life of Christ.

And so we rejoice that God never let's go of us. Through Isaiah we hear (Isa.41:10): "Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand."

When we experience times in our lives when we have fear and are dismayed, either by circumstances or things we've brought on ourselves, God says don't fear, "for I am with you" so "do not be dismayed" for His is our God. He is the one Who will strengthen you when you are weak and when you feel like falling, He will "uphold you with [His] righteous right hand." The right hand is the hand of authority and strength so it's no coincidence that Isaiah mentions God's right hand.

Being a disciple means being found by God. Being a disciple means telling others about Him. Being a disciple means receiving peace and blessing from God.

We are called into a life of peace and blessing with God: Jesus sees us, He knows everything about us and perceives our deepest needs. And as we follow Him, as He says to Nathanael, "[we] will see heaven opened..." Jesus Christ is, indeed, a Saviour to be followed – and it is a lifetime's work for us (but also a lifetime's joy) to live out these two simple instructions: "Follow Me!" and "Come and see!"

Today, we follow. And today we see. The words of Jesus in this passage constitute a powerful invitation to us. What do you seek? Come, and you will see. Follow Me. You shall see greater things! Amen!