

Sermon January 14, 2018

Make Like Philip

John 1: 43-51

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

So, we have gone from Christmas in a stable in Bethlehem, to Epiphany in a house in the same village where the toddler Jesus is visited by Gentile magi from the East, then a hurried escape by Joseph and Mary and Jesus into Egypt to escape King Herod's wrath – that is, the slaughter of all children age 2 and under. And yes, it is true that Jesus and his family were refugees from violence. Then after some time, when it's safe the Holy family returns to Nazareth, and from then on, we know very little of Jesus' growth into adulthood. Well, we do have one story from Luke – the New Testament's *Home Alone* story when Jesus is accidentally left behind in the temple in Jerusalem but other than that nothing in the New Testament about Jesus life growing up. Scholars have speculated that during his late teens and twenties Jesus may have taken over his father's carpentry business, or perhaps he worked on the coast maybe in Phoenicia building ships coming into contact with all kinds of different people and varied cultures, or maybe he spent time with the Essene community, a Jewish group that practiced a communal life of poverty. They lived in isolation, immersed in

scripture and prayer, they have often been compared to Christian monastic communities. Or maybe Jesus did all three and more.

After Jesus' baptism by his cousin John the Baptist, an event recorded in all the gospel narratives, Jesus begins to gather disciples. Our gospel text for today is from the first chapter of John. Jesus has already called his very first disciple Andrew, then Andrew invites his brother Simon Peter. And now this morning we hear Jesus call Philip, and Philip invites Nathaniel.

And we can't help but to wonder what was it about Jesus that instilled faith in these earliest disciples? Was it his looks? Or how he looked at them? Was it his words? Or was it how he spoke. We are told he didn't speak like the religious professionals of the day but as one who had authority. What was it? Jesus will tell Nathaniel "I saw you under a fig tree." I saw you talking with Philip a long way off. We learn that Jesus is not bound by human limitations. When we hear these words, we would do well to recall the prologue to John's gospel – "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Jesus may be fully human but he is God's only Son, divine. He is Word made manifest, the Word of God in the flesh. I recall reading years ago British theologian J. B. Philips writing about Jesus' magnetism. Perhaps it was a divine magnetism that was able to attract so many.

It attracted Philip, but there's a little twist, when Philip shares with Nathaniel that the one about whom the prophets have foretold has been found – Jesus the son of Joseph from Nazareth, Nathaniel observes– “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” To our ears what does that sound like? Can anything good come out of West Baltimore? Can anything good come out of the Pimlico neighborhood? Can anything good come out of the impoverished neighborhoods of Detroit, Chicago, L.A.? Can anything good come out of Haiti, Africa or El Salvador? Prejudice and unkind judgements are nothing new no matter who utters them.

Take note of Philip's reaction. Does he get angry? Does he attack Nathaniel? Does he go onto Facebook and rant? Of course not, I am being facetious. But Philip does not hit back. He tells Nathaniel, “Come and see”. A simple, gracious, disarming invitation. Come and see.

And this is the story of Christian evangelism ever since. One person tells another person, “I follow Jesus, why don't you join me and I'll show you what I have found. Come and see”. Person to person. People meet Jesus and they are transformed. And they tell others, and so the Christian faith spread from Palestine to Asia Minor and Africa, Rome and Europe and all around the globe. As

the church grew parents brought their children to meet Jesus in baptism and then bring them up to follow him.

Person to person. God does not call you to mount an exacting defense of the faith, an exhausting explication of Christian dogma – leave that to the theologians. The Good News is that the Holy Spirit will give you all the words that you need, will give you the courage to speak up and make like Philip and invite others to simply “come and see.” Or as Martin Luther said, sharing the faith is one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread.

For hundreds of years, especially since the advent of advertising, Christian congregations are always on the hunt for the killer sign, the right brochure, the exciting evangelism program that will “bring in new members.” Or the right pastor, if only we can find the pastor with super charisma and pizzazz then our pastor will bring new people to our doors. If only we construct the church web site in just the right way it will attract people, lots of people.

Signs are helpful, websites are important in this day and age, but looking for that one program, that dynamic pastor who can attract crowds, that technique, the perfect strategy is like searching for the Holy Grail.

Person to person. That is the strategy straight out of scripture. We share our story, in our own words, telling others what our faith means to us. What God

has done for us in Christ Jesus. Why we come here to worship, to give of our treasure, to give some piece of ourselves away to help those in need, those who need a helping hand. Our helping hands.

Salem sisters and brothers, this is the time, if ever there was a time, this is the time we invite others. Why? Because we are strong, and we are growing, and I say that not to boast, I say that not immodestly but as an honest reflection of our life together at this time. This is the time we do evangelism because we are not poisoning our invitation with our own needs. We are not desperate to put people in the pews and money in the offering plate, you don't hear us saying "we need new people to chair the committees and do the heavy lifting because we are tired, exhausted". We are so blessed to be able to say that is not our situation. This is the time we do evangelism, we tell our story, we gently invite, we encourage others because it is not about us and our needs, it is about the God-given desire each of us has to share the Good News of Christ Jesus with our family and friends, our co-workers and neighbors.

Years ago, I was sitting in the pew at St. Mark's by myself, waiting for the worship service to begin. One of my fellow members, slipped in beside me, Don Merryman, and he said to me, "Dave, would you like to sign up for the blood drive?" I hesitated for a moment, thought about it and replied, "I guess I can do

that.” Don said, “You’ve never given blood before have you?” “That’s right,” I replied. “Why not?”, he asked. And I said, “Because no one ever asked me.”

Person to person. Make like Philip. Tell your story. Invite others to come and experience God in this place, come. Invite others to hear the Good News among this fellowship of Jesus’ disciples. No one may have ever asked them.

Make like Philip.

Amen