

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

Christ Our Savior Evangelical Lutheran Church

Called By Christ

John 1:43-51

The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, "Follow me."⁴⁴ Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida.⁴⁵ Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote-- Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."⁴⁶ "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" Nathanael asked. "Come and see," said Philip.⁴⁷ When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, "Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false."⁴⁸ "How do you know me?" Nathanael asked. Jesus answered, "I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you."⁴⁹ Then Nathanael declared, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel."⁵⁰ Jesus said, "You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You shall see greater things than that."⁵¹ He then added, "I tell you the truth, you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, a man named Ted Paraskevacos was working on an invention that would have a large impact on communication in our world. He developed a system that allowed telephone users to identify the phone number of the person that was calling them before they picked up the phone. This system became known as Caller ID. Most of us today are familiar with Caller ID. It can be a helpful tool. If you do not recognize the number of the person calling you, you might decide to ignore the call. Some people use it to ignore calls even when they do not recognize the caller if it is someone they don't want to hear at that moment. Imagine receiving a call on the phone and the caller ID display read, "THE LORD." That is a call you would definitely want to take. Sadly, however, many people ignore or refuse to listen when the Lord speaks in his Word. At times, this includes each of us. As we look at the call of Philip and Nathanael, we receive encouragement to Listen when the Lord Calls.

In the first few verses of our reading, we see the Lord calling two of his disciples. The first he calls is Philip. His call is very simple. Jesus tells Philip, "Follow me." We don't have Philip's reply in words. His reply comes in his actions. He immediately goes to speak with Nathanael. It is clear by his words to Nathanael that Philip intended to follow Jesus. He had placed his trust in Jesus as the Messiah and he listened to his call. He wanted Nathanael to do the same. And so the Lord's call came to Nathanael. This time, his call came through another person. Jesus didn't speak directly to Nathanael. The Lord used Philip to speak to Nathanael as Philip said, "*We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.*" Philip pointed Nathanael to the Word of God and to Jesus as the fulfillment of that Word. Perhaps he was thinking of Moses' words in Deuteronomy chapter 18: "*The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him.*"

Nathanael was not quite certain about Philip's assessment of Jesus. He got hung up on the final words Nathanael spoke: "Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." Nathanael was a faithful Jew. He was looking forward to the coming of the Messiah who would redeem Israel together with all the nations of the world. He was not looking for this Messiah to come from Nazareth. We don't know for certain what Nathanael's motive was behind his words: "*Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?*" He may have thought that Nazareth was an unworthy town for the birth of the Messiah. He may have known people from Nazareth and judged the whole city by their character. It may be simply the fact that the Scriptures never spoke specifically about the Messiah coming from Nazareth. For whatever reason, Nathanael was not going to listen to the call of a Messiah whose area code was listed as "Nazareth."

How do you react when the Lord gives you a call? Do you react more like Philip or more like Nathanael at first? I guess first we have to realize how the Lord calls us. It is not exactly the same as in our reading. We do not have Jesus here with us in the flesh to come up to us and say, "Follow me." But what does John call Jesus at the beginning of his Gospel? He writes, "*In the beginning was the Word.*" Jesus is the eternal Word of God. Whenever we come into contact with God's Word, Jesus is calling out to us. The Lord can also use people to bring us his call, as he did with Philip speaking to Nathanael. It might be a pastor speaking the Word of God on a Sunday morning. It could be as simple as Christian friend or relative who brings up

God's Word in a casual conversation. Whatever the means he uses, whenever the Word is brought to you, God himself is calling you. He might be calling you to repentance for a sin in your life. He might be calling you to follow him as he called Philip and Nathanael.

And what will you do when the Lord calls? Will you ignore his call? Will you find an excuse not to listen to him on that day—not to follow him. Perhaps what God says in his Word doesn't make sense to your human reason, so you choose to ignore it. Perhaps what he says offends your sinful nature so you don't want to hear it. Perhaps when he calls you to follow, you think it is too difficult—he is asking too much of you. Maybe you think his call to follow is intended for someone else and not for you. Whatever the excuse is, there are times we choose to ignore his call and it always will end up hurting us—spiritually. God has a reason for giving us his Word. He has a good purpose for bringing his message. When he calls, we should listen.

Thankfully, God is patient and forgiving. When people ignore his call at first, he doesn't give up on them. Look at how he treated Nathanael. After Nathanael initially rejected the idea that Jesus could be the Messiah, the Lord invited Nathanael through Philip to *"come and see."* That was the best advice that Philip could give Nathanael. If he had doubts or was uncertain about this Jesus, he should go and see for himself. When he did go, he found someone amazing. It is great to see the patient and loving way Jesus treats Nathanael. When Nathanael went with Philip to see Jesus, Jesus did not say, "Here is the man who didn't think anything good could come from Nazareth." Jesus said, *"Here is a true Israelite in whom there is nothing false."* Jesus then went out of his way to convince Nathanael he was truly the Messiah by making use of his almighty and all-knowing power and telling Nathanael that he had seen him under the fig tree even before Philip came to him and called him. This was enough for Nathanael. He was convinced. He gave a beautiful confession of faith: *"Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel."*

In response to Nathanael's confession, Jesus told him, in essence, "If you think what you just saw was impressive, just wait. You haven't seen anything yet compared to what you will see." Nathanael would be a witness to many wonderful acts of the Savior. Nothing would be greater than the act of salvation by his death and resurrection. Nathanael would be an eye-witness to the doors of heaven flying open as Jesus suffered and died for the sins of the world and brought peace and reconciliation to mankind. This great act of love on Jesus' part would be more than enough to convince Nathanael that he truly is the Son of God and that he should listen to him and follow him every day of his life.

It is amazing how the Lord acts with us in a similar patient and loving way. Just think of it: in spite of our sinfulness, the Lord comes to us in his Word and calls to us again and again. We would be honored if we had the opportunity to beg, scratch, and claw our way into the Lord's presence. We don't deserve an audience with the king of kings. But, out of love, he gives us that audience. He actually invites us into his presence. He gives us the opportunity to hear him speak. And he speaks words of peace and forgiveness. What amazing love! Of course we will listen. The call itself works the faith we need to listen and believe.

Not only does the Lord call us to faith in this wonderful way, he also calls us to follow him as he called Philip and Nathanael. The ability to answer this call comes from the same place as the ability to answer the call to faith—the Spirit working through the Word and sacraments. We simply have to do what Nathanael did: come and see. See what God has done for us through his Son Jesus Christ. See the forgiveness that Jesus earned for us on the cross. See the eternal life that is waiting for us in the mansions of heaven. See what joy there is in answering his call and living a life not for our own selfish sinful purposes but for his glory while we are here on this earth. Come and see. And then follow—willingly and completely by faith.

In the days to come, take some time to appreciate all the times the Lord is calling to you. Whether it is in private devotion time in his Word, public worship on Sunday morning or through a friend or family member who is speaking the Word to you. Hear the Lord calling to you and listen. Respond the way Philip and Nathanael did. Follow him. You will not be disappointed. **Amen.**