

**Epiphany 2 Year A**  
**St. John's Tappahannock**  
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**Jesus calls disciples - John 1:29-42 (expanded to\_36-51)**

<sup>29</sup> The next day he saw Jesus coming towards him and declared, 'Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! <sup>30</sup> This is he of whom I said, "After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me." <sup>31</sup> I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel.' <sup>32</sup> And John testified, 'I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. <sup>33</sup> I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, "He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit." <sup>34</sup> And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God.'<sup>[a]</sup>

<sup>35</sup> The next day John was standing again with two of his disciples. <sup>36</sup> When he saw Jesus walking along he said, "Look! The Lamb of God!" <sup>37</sup> The two disciples heard what he said, and they followed Jesus.

<sup>38</sup> When Jesus turned and saw them following, he asked, **"What are you looking for?"**

They said, "Rabbi (which is translated *Teacher*), where are you staying?"

<sup>39</sup> He replied, **"Come and see."** So they went and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon.

<sup>40</sup> One of the two disciples who heard what John said and followed Jesus was Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter. <sup>41</sup> He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated *Christ*). <sup>42</sup> He led him to Jesus.

**(ADD) I am going to start by reading the next several verses of today's gospel reading, (42-51) because I will be including some ideas from what is really the rest of this particular story.**

Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon, son of John. You will be called Cephas" (which is translated *Peter*).

<sup>43</sup> The next day Jesus wanted to go into Galilee, and he found Philip. Jesus said to him, "Follow me." <sup>44</sup> Philip was from Bethsaida, the hometown of Andrew and Peter.

<sup>45</sup> Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law and the Prophets: Jesus, Joseph's son, from Nazareth."

<sup>46</sup> Nathanael responded, "**Can anything from Nazareth be good?**"

Philip said, "**Come and see.**"

<sup>47</sup> Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said about him, "Here is a genuine Israelite in whom there is no deceit."

<sup>48</sup> Nathanael asked him, "How do you know me?"

Jesus answered, "Before Philip called you, I saw you under the fig tree."

<sup>49</sup> Nathanael replied, "Rabbi, you are God's Son. You are the king of Israel."

<sup>50</sup> Jesus answered, "Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these! <sup>51</sup> **I assure you that you will see heaven open and God's angels going up to heaven and down to earth on the Son of Man.**"<sup>Ⓜ</sup>

## Sermon

In today's gospel reading it seems that there are two stories being told, one of Jesus' baptism, and one of the calling of the disciples. However it is John the Baptist who is speaking about Jesus' threshold ritual to his ministry, and the most important line to me is, "***And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God.***"

We also know already that the disciples were called to learn and experience the good news, in preparation for proclaiming it. So the common thread here is a message about evangelism. It is also about the power of *being known* by our Lord and savior, and *being nurtured* for discipleship.

**"What are you looking for?"** These are the first words spoken by Jesus in the Gospel of John.

These words capture the essence of all that follows. Jesus, who shares the divinity of God, has come into the world as its savior. Yet, his first words are a question. This opening narrative represents John's *evangelistic* approach.

John the gospel writer's community is rooted in Jewish tradition, that anticipates God's saving act, the sending of the Messiah. The writers of Mark, Matthew and Luke were all writing roughly between 60 and 70 AD, and are called the synoptics because they share much of the same material. The writer of the gospel of John, was writing in about 100 AD, and his writing style is different, and his community has evolved. John's community now looks beyond the synagogue, with a mission to those who are God's beloved creatures, but who are not Jews looking for a Messiah. How does one preach Christ to those who are not looking for a Messiah? Does one first instruct them in the biblical and Jewish view of the world, and instill in them a Messianic hope? Or can one begin with them where they are? Can the Christian message conceived and born in Judaism, be translated into new, non-Jewish terms? **1**

In the gospel of John, those who express their ultimate hopes in the coming Messiah hear Jesus say, "I am the Christ." (1:41, 4:26, etc.) By the end of the story, the writer of John will not express the meaning of the Christ event in only messianic terms. In John 20:30-31 we read: "Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book, but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, *and that by believing you may have life in his name*".

To that vast majority of human beings who are not expecting a Messiah, Jesus also asks, "*What are you looking for?*" These are people are the Gentiles, and we might call them seekers today, people whose hopes are expressed in terms of universal human longing. To

them the Jesus of the gospel of John will identify himself as the way, the truth, the life, as the source of true light, the good shepherd, the door, the gate, bread, and water. (These are known as the I am statements). These words are directed to all, but especially, those without knowledge of the Jewish expectation of a Messiah.

And in fact, as we shall see in the following discussion, those who *are* expecting a Messiah are also *seekers*, or as we modern people have said at various times in our lives, they are looking for *themselves*. So Jesus has in my mind, always had this dual role of empowering people to build God's kingdom of justice and kindness on earth, and, helping us to find ourselves...to live into our God given potential. Our serving has to come out of a deep self-understanding if it is to be effectual, and if it is to be rewarding.

The next part of the narrative is filled with much whimsy and humor. And will help us understand why it is important for us to both see Christ as the savior and redeemer of humankind, and our guide on our spiritual quest for meaning.

When Jesus asks Simon Peter and Andrew **“What are you looking for?”**, they ask where Jesus is staying. It is as if they cannot yet put into words what they are seeking, but they are drawn to this person of Jesus because intuitively they know he will help them find the answer to their deepest questions. This man was so compelling they just walked away from their normal occupations to spend time with him, talk, break bread, and be in his presence. You can just imagine their thoughts, “Could this really be the long- expected Messiah? And what does that mean for me?”

And the answer Jesus gives is, **“Come and see”**. This can mean both the concrete answer to where Jesus is lodging, but also, he is telling them that through Him, they will understand all things more deeply, they will

see things more clearly, they will grow in knowledge, they will find what it is that they have been looking for, that will fulfill an as yet unnamed longing within.

And then Nathanael, in whom there is no deceit, yet apparently still has a bit of a disbelieving edge to his voice, comes along and says, **“What good could come from Nazareth”**.

I am sure later on he would eat his words. For soon enough he would see who this Jesus was in the eyes of God and people to whom he has given renewed hope that they can even imagine new worlds for themselves – i.e., even dare to think that things could be different, better than living under Roman oppression offered them.

When I was young I used to think it must have been hard for the disciples, mostly fishermen, to rip themselves from their family lives and follow an itinerant preacher to...where exactly? However, as Diana Butler Bass suggests in her book, *A Beautiful Year, 52 Meditations on Faith, Wisdom and Perseverence*, it was not hard at all. Fishermen were at the low end of the economic ladder, they had very hard back-breaking jobs, the main protein source for the entire population of Israel was fish, all of their best catch went the Roman occupiers, and the next best went to merchants, who gave a pittance to the fisherman in return, whose diet was the least desirable fish of the catch. Life was a matter of subsistence. **2**

So yes, Jesus offered something that no one had yet given them the courage to consider – how life could be different, better. That is what the good news is all about. Bettering ourselves, bettering the world by empowering those who have the least.

So what good could come from Nazareth? The Son of God and Son of humanity whose message has transformed the lives of millions of people in the world over the last 2000 years; around whose life, death

and resurrection the great institution of Mother Church was built; which still functions world-wide to prioritize the needs of the powerless, the hungry, and the dispossessed through the generosity and muscle of its members, and to work for social justice **for all people**; whose life has inspired great music, great art, great architecture, in short, has inspired many to live fully in his Name. And is the One who was born in a humble manger and who invites us to be with him now and into Eternity.

And when Philip said, “Come and see”, Nathaniel met Jesus, saw that Jesus knew who he was by simply looking into his heart, and then was given the promise implicit in the Jacob’s ladder reference, as if this sense of being known and understood wasn’t enough. (For isn’t that what we all seek? To be known and understood?)

Yet, flashback to the powerful image of Jacob’s Ladder, we are able to glimpse more fully the One who is in the bosom of God who he made known. At the very depths of our being, we all long to know, and be known, in Jesus. And that by believing we will experience what church father Irenaeus meant when he said, “The glory of God is the human being fully alive” – folks *in community* living out their passions for life and sharing that joy. Living that balance that St. Francis urges in his prayer petition – “Seek not only to be understood, but to understand”. It is a two-way street, loving others as Jesus loves us.

And the Jacob’s ladder image shows us that this man Jesus is the bridge between two worlds, the One who will show the disciples of every age, that we, through the power of the Holy Spirit, can participate in the bringing in of God’s kingdom.

What exactly it is that disciples are being invited to? – First, that we know we are loved and precious in God’s sight regardless of where we come from, and we can change and grow – second, that we will be

expected to make sacrifices along the way (particular to our own circumstances) – and third, to expect that we will practice radical love in a harsh world that will not understand us much of the time. Often, we are called to that radical, tough love, right where we are, in our own families and communities.

Sometimes, especially in chaotic times as we are now experiencing, we are tempted to expect God to come down and fix everything.

Meanwhile, God is expecting *us* to participate in the bringing in of His kingdom. We may not see God at work, but we can be sure, God gave us intelligence. God does not use a magic wand. God responds to our prayers within the context of every difficulty, empowering us to work for solutions to complex problems through it all.

God expects us to pray *and* to use the brainpower we are bestowed with, that differentiates us from all other life forms, to work through all current and ongoing issues, and not be polarized and otherwise act from inner fears and biases.

As disciples we must continue to spread the message of God's presence in all things to all people. We must be a light to others that God's love for all of humanity is still a clear and distinct message that has not wavered through the ages.

This is an especially opportune time to invite those who may be full of anxiety to experience the peace of God that surpasses all understanding, because it is through people that God's love is made real. How can our faith and imagination reach out to comfort those who are isolated, worried, disconnected, or otherwise *seeking*? That is our work right now – to be the church without walls, creatively and with confidence, guided by the Holy Spirit.

Let us continue to be a welcoming presence to all people during these unusually troubling times. Then, we can help grow the Kingdom in ways we have not even imagined. Let's not be afraid to ask, "What are you looking for?" And if folks are seeking something as yet un-named, we can reply, "Come to St. John's, seek, and you shall find, and learn that by believing, you may have life in His name". In other words, invite folks to visit and discover the joy in worshipping and serving others together.

We are all beautiful threads in a tapestry that would not be complete without us. It's not about one big thing we will do someday...it's about a lifetime of evolving into our ability to be a spiritual presence to others, so that, along with our companions on the way, God's kingdom will manifest *whenever we testify to the Hope we have in Christ Jesus.*

**Amen**

## **Resources**

1. Boring, M. Eugene; An Introduction to the New Testament; History, Literature and Theology; Westminster John Knox Press; Louisville, KY; 2012; p. 672
2. Bass, Diana Butler; A Beautiful Year – 52 Meditations on Faith Wisdom, and Perseverance; St. Martin's Essentials Publishing Group; 2025; p. 93

