

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Quincy, IL
Rev. Martin Eden

Epiphany 2
Saturday, January 13, 2024, at 5:00 p.m.
Sunday, January 14, 2024, at 9:00 a.m.

“Come and See”

John 1:43-51

Here in John’s Gospel, we read about the calling of one of the lesser known disciples: St. Bartholomew – also known as Nathanael. I referenced Nathanael at Christmas when we were talking about Jesus’ home town of Nazareth and how that little town was one of the least likely places for the Messiah to come from. Nathanael sums up the general perception of Nazareth when he says, “Nazareth! Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”

Other than this account of his being called into the office of apostle, the only other time that Nathanael’s name is mentioned in the Bible is when the names of all of the disciples are listed.

Not much is known about Nathanael. We know that he grew up in the same town as Peter, Andrew, and Philip. And from the other Gospel accounts, we know that James and John were also from Bethsaida. But other than growing up in that town we don’t know anything about him, except that Christ saw him sitting under the fig tree, and Jesus chose him to be one of His disciples.

And we know that Nathanael believed, because, he obviously was someone who Philip recognized as one who was waiting for the Messiah of whom Moses and the prophets wrote, and upon hearing of the Christ and then hearing Christ Himself, Nathanael confesses his faith by saying “you are the Son of God; you are

the King of Israel.”

That may be all that was ever written about Nathanael. And this one event of Nathanael’s life is certainly the most important event of his life up to this point. But why is this story so important that it is recorded for all generations to hear? We don’t hear how Simon the Zealot came to faith. We don’t hear how many of the disciples were called. But the calling of Nathanael is important, because just like Nathanael, before you knew Him, you were chosen by God to be His faithful follower. Scripture tells us that God knew you before the foundations of the world were put in place. He has always known you; He has always loved you.

Nathanael is convinced of who Jesus is when the Lord tells him that He saw him underneath the fig tree. Now, in the Bible, the fig tree is a rather prominent plant. The Bible refers to fig trees 40 times. In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve made garments of fig leaves to hide their nakedness. They were now under judgment. They now knew what sin is. And in the days leading up to His crucifixion, Jesus cast judgment on the fig tree that did not bear any fruit, and immediately that fig tree withered and died.

There is no direct connection between the calling of Nathanael and the withering fig tree or the fig leaf loin cloths of the Garden of Eden. However, without Christ calling Nathanael to be a disciple, Nathanael would have been as spiritually withered, and dead, and unproductive as the withered fig tree; and as spiritually naked as Adam and Eve after the Fall.

Even though Jesus says about Nathanael, “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!” Even though Nathanael was a model citizen, without Christ calling him, he was spiritually withered and dead. He needed to be clothed in Christ’s robe of righteousness.

Being a model citizen is not what gave salvation to Nathanael. Being

called to faith by the Son of God is what gave him spiritual life. If Nathanael would have ignored the words of Philip who said to him, "Come and see." If Nathanael would have stayed under the fig tree, Nathanael would have withered and died. Without Christ, there is no true life within anyone.

Like Nathanael, God chose you from the beginning. Nathanael believed because Jesus said to him, "Before Philip called you, when you were still under the fig tree, I saw you."

A question that you may ask yourself is "Why do I believe?" It is not just because you were born into a certain family or raised in a certain way. Members of the same household often hold very different views of God. All of us have somewhat different backgrounds, but all of those different influences have led us to this one, common place. We all have had different experiences, but each one of us has been led to this same faith in God.

I have said numerous times: I give thanks to God that I was born, baptized, and raised within a faithful family and raised within the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, because I have never had to go somewhere else to seek out the truth of the Word of God. My family was not perfect. Our church is not perfect. But God's Word of truth was always before my eyes. It is no secret formula, it is God's Word that changes us, that makes us who we are. We see this so clearly demonstrated in Baptism when God's Word joined with the water has changed us and marked us in a permanent way.

We all have different backgrounds and experiences, but we are all here for the same reason. We are here for the same reason that Nathanael confessed his faith and said, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God, you are the King of Israel."

The reason that we are all here is because, like Nathanael, we have heard the truth of the Word of God. That is the one thing that we all have in common. We have heard the Word of God, and we have received that Word in faith.

Someone in your past spent some time with you and brought the Word of God into your life. Most likely, not too many of you were sitting under fig trees just before you came to faith. But God could say to each one of you, “I saw you while you were still...” somewhere. I saw you, and because I love you, follow me, remain in me, and your soul will never wither or die.”

God has called each one of you to follow Him. Just as Philip went to Nathanael and told him about Christ, and said, “Come and see,” God has sent people into your life to share with you that Good News of salvation – who said to you, “Come and see.”

Now, Nathanael did not only follow Jesus, but he told others about Christ, about the gift of salvation, the gift of eternal life.

Being a follower of Christ involves sharing this fantastic message of life in Christ with others, as Philip did with Nathanael. God has richly blessed you, and He has given you an opportunity to be a blessing to others. Each of you has the opportunity to give another person the great gift Philip gave to Nathanael. You can be like Philip, who said, “Come and see.”

Someday, perhaps a friend or neighbor, or your child, or your brother or sister will ask himself or herself, “Why do I believe? The obvious answer is, of course, that it was the work of the Holy Spirit through the Word of God. But the further question is, “what person did the Holy Spirit use to make an impact on my life? God always works through means.

When and where did I first hear about Christ and receive faith? For many of us, it was at Baptism – thanks be to God. But that faith needs to be nurtured, just as the child needs to be nurtured. I have early memories of watching my dad preach and sitting with my mom as she taught me to use the hymnal. Who was it that said to you, ‘Come and see?’ Give thanks to God that He has sent these people into our lives. Amen.