**John 1:43-51** January 14, 2018

Pastor P. Martin **Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY** Epiphany 2

*John 1:43The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, “Follow me.” 44Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. 45Philip 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.*

*47When 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.” 49Then Nathanael declared, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel.” 50Jesus said, “You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You shall see greater things than that.” 51He 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.”*

Dear Friends in Christ,

**The Sheep That Thought It Found a Shepherd**

**I. How Sheep and the Good Shepherd Meet**

It’s there every week on the front of the bulletin: *“It is our mission to seek the unchurched.”* That is our church’s mission statement. Philip, of our reading, certainly lived up to that.

Jesus said to Philip, ***“Follow me.”*** What was the first thing Philip did? He ran off. Perhaps some of the other people were wondering if Philip got cold feet, if he was refusing the Savior’s call. It did sometimes happen, you know. Like when Jesus told that rich young man to sell all he had and follow him. And when he heard that, the man’s shoulders slumped and he moped off to wherever he had come from.

Jesus knew that was *not* what happened to Philip. Philip ran off, not to run away, but to bring a companion for the road, for the great adventure of following Jesus of Nazareth. Philip went, found his friend named 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.”*** *Then* Philip came back to Jesus, not just to follow Jesus, but to follow with a travelling companion.

What would have happened if Philip had not gone to get Nathanael? Would Jesus have gone to find him? Would we have Jesus’ Eleven Disciples, instead of Twelve? Who knows! But the fact was that Jesus was pleased to have Philip be his mouthpiece, to use him and his friendship evangelism to swell the ranks of his people.

Now it is good to know a little about Philip, because Philip was not the exemplary disciple. We don’t really know much about Philip – or most of the Twelve for that matter. We only have four events where Philip is mentioned in the Gospels. And of those four, this is the only one where Philip really shines. In the other three events he seems just a little ordinary, an inside-the-box sort of thinker. For example, when Jesus sees five thousand hungry people in front of him, he asks Philip what to do. Philip does the math and says, “Nope. Can’t do it. *Eight months wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!”* (John 6:7). Which is pretty much how Philip comes across in all the other events.

But you know what? God doesn’t want only the best and brightest in his kingdom. And I am glad for that. That would be a terrible burden to hope that you were smart enough, clever enough with the comeback, got good enough grades, had a work ethic that wouldn’t quit, or were voted the most caring person. Because if Jesus wanted those sorts of people, he wouldn’t want me.

But he is pleased to have an ordinary guy like Philip, a humble fisherman from a town so insignificant that we don’t know anymore where it once existed, who sometimes was a little slow-witted. Not only was Jesus pleased to call him to faith, he was pleased to make him one of his Twelve, and he was even pleased to have this event from Philip memorialized for the rest of eternity in the first chapter of the Gospel of John – that Philip did something great and wonderful because when he heard about Jesus, he shared it with someone else. Praise be to God! May this saint inspire us to ordinary acts of friendship and kindness: simply sharing the news about Jesus in the most simple of ways.

Philip went to a friend. This is how most evangelism happens. Friends are the best people to speak to others because friends are most likely to give friends a hearing. Friends are most likely to do what Nathanael did – to give Philip the benefit of the doubt. If a stranger or casual acquaintance had said what Philip said, humanly speaking, Nathanael would not have given it a second thought. His, ***“Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?”*** would have settled the issue. He would have never gone near Jesus. But his friend’s sincere invitation “Come and see,” led him to check it out.

*You* have earned a right to speak, to be heard, to open the door for the Gospel in your friends’ lives! You don’t have to argue about it. Simply do what Philip did: invite them to encounter Jesus. Let them hear Jesus speak about the great need that we have, a need for forgiveness and acceptance from God. Let it be our kind act of friendship that invites them.

Sometimes we ight think that we need witnessing so that the Church continues to grow, so that new people replace those who leave, young ones to replace those who one day leave this world. That is the wrong answer. If that is our motive for sharing Jesus, we have made it about us and not God. We have made it about our survival, not his glory.

Witnessing, evangelism, outreach, whatever you want to call it, best comes from a heart that wants to bring glory to God and eternal life to people. You see, it cannot be about us, but it must come back to love for God and love for neighbor, not love for ourselves!

Which is why I invite you to join with us in our School of Outreach. It was going to take place this coming Saturday, but now will be taking place in April. I can insist on no one attending, because if I insist on it, then you will be there for the wrong reason. It won’t be about other people or God, but about a pastor’s frowning expectation.

Think about the School of Outreach as a way to learn to share the greatest gift we have ever been given! Let us learn to simply say, “Come and see!” Let us bring sheep to their Good Shepherd.

**II. Who Finds Whom**

There is one thing I found especially curious in our reading. When Philip went to his good friend Nathanael, did you hear his first words? Let me re-read it, ***“Philip said, ‘We have found the one Moses wrote about…’”*** Philip is so excited about finding the Messiah that he has to tell his friend.

In the same chapter, just before our reading, something similar had happened. Another of Jesus’ disciples named Andrew, did the same thing. After beginning to follow Jesus, Andrew went, found his brother Peter, and said, *“We have found the Messiah”* (41).

They both said, ***“We have found him.”*** But did they? Does a near-sighted, lost sheep, seeing its shepherd drawing near, have any right to say, “I have finally found my shepherd. Silly shepherd!”?

A classic kids’ film of another generation, *Lion King*, has an interesting take on this. A lion cub named Simba is in quite a pickle. He is surrounded by three hungry hyenas. He is sure he is hyena food. So Simba bares his tiny lion cub claws and teeth. Suddenly the hyenas cower in fear and run. Simba proudly struts around. “Yep, those hyenas know a king when they see one.” And then you see that Simba’s dad, a full grown, in-his-prime lion, had snuck up behind Simba, and the hyenas turned tail and ran, not from Simba the cub, but from Mufasa the Lion King.

“We have found the Messiah!” Philip and Andrew both proclaimed. But is that what happened? Read carefully. (And this is why it pays to *carefully* read our Bibles. Because we have a very high ability to hear what we want to hear in our Bibles.) Read carefully about who found whom: ***“The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, ‘Follow me.’”*** Who found whom? Jesus found Philip. Jesus went out of his way to find Philip. Jesus called Philip. Philip was a sheep that would never have found the Good Shepherd had the shepherd not gone looking for him.

And the same thing for Andrew, who said to his brother Peter, *“We have found the Messiah.”* John 1 tells us that Andrew did not know Jesus, except that John the Baptist pointed at Jesus and said, “Look, the Lamb of God!” Then Andrew followed Jesus.

On the other hand, Nathanael never claimed to have “found” Jesus in our reading, but maybe that is because Jesus had had enough of the stolen valor and gently set Nathanael right right from the start when he said, ***“I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you.”*** Jesus would say, “You, Nathanael, are standing here before me, not because you found me, not even really because Philip told you, but because I saw you before Philip even thought of telling you, before any of these things were set in motion.”

This is the Scriptural teaching about coming to faith. All of those who claim the day that they decided for Christ, well, at best, they are like lost sheep claiming to have found their Shepherd. Silly sheep!

But those who insist on this are something much worse. Now you might say, “Does it really matter? At least they are saved.” True. Salvation is the really important thing.

But consider this. Back in 2005 and again in 2013 the United States Congress passed laws called Stolen Valor Acts. In these acts Congress declared it a criminal offense to wear unauthorized military decorations and medals. It is a crime to take credit for acts of military bravery that you never had any part of. I would guess that every single one of us supports those laws. It *is* disgraceful to take credit for acts of bravery that one never had any part of.

Should it be any different with God’s work? (I realize that there was no malice, more likely just a little bit of sloppy thinking on Andrew and Philip’s part.) But how can we take credit for what God has wrought? How can we say, “I decided for Jesus…” ***“We found him…”*** No, Philip. No, Andrew. He found you.

So great is this self-glorifying impulse, and so far-seeing is our Savior, that he later reminded his disciples, “*You did not choose me, but I chose you”* (15:16). Likewise, one of our hymns sings, *“Lord, 'tis not that I did choose you; That, I know, could never be, For this heart would still refuse you Had your grace not chosen me.”* (*CW* 380)

We thank God that the Good Shepherd has found us. This leads us to have three thoughts toward God.

1. The truth that God brought us to faith teaches us to give credit and joyful thanksgiving where credit is due. No stolen valor, no patting ourselves on the back. Let us simply praise God and thank God that we are his!

2. The truth that God knew us from eternity and brought us to faith according to his plan teaches us to treasure God’s wonderful gift. For example, which gift do you treasure more: A gift someone has planned out and arranged for you months in advance, or a last-minute gift bought at Walgreens at 8pm on Christmas Eve? (And if any of you guys don’t know the answer to that question, just ask your wives.) God knew us long before we came to faith, before we were even born, and he worked it out so that we would know our Savior. How wonderful our gift of faith is!

3. The truth that God brought us to faith makes us amazed that God would entrust his plans for calling people to faith to us. We, like Philip, may be believers, but we have our faults, don’t we! God calls people through his word, but he has entrusted the work of speaking that word to you and me. Which comes back to the first part of this sermon. Let us take seriously the privilege and duty to speak the message of Savior Jesus to those around us.

May God use his word in our mouths to show the lost and straying sheep of this world their Good Shepherd. Amen.