



Phillip and Nathaniel

Gen 28:10-19a 2 Cor 5:16-21 John 1:43-51

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God has called you by name to believe in Jesus.

Before God created the heavens and the earth and everything seen and unseen, He chose you to be His very own. By name, by grace, in Christ, **God chose you** to be a Christian. And then during your lifetime, He worked the events of your life so that you were baptized. In your Baptism He called you by name and gave you faith in Jesus. Ever since then, He has been working through His Word and Holy Communion to nurture and strengthen your faith until He graciously takes you from this veil of tears to Himself in Heaven¹.

Today we saw Jesus call Phillip with His powerful Word. Jesus simply said, “*Follow Me*,” and faith was created. The power is always in the Word of God; just as it was for us in the Word and water of Baptism².

For Phillip, Jesus’ call immediately changed him. His life has changed. He is so excited that he could not help but share this good news with others. He quickly goes and finds Nathaniel, and tells him about Jesus. That's the nature of faith; it brings joy and excitement to your life! ***Its contagious!*** The Christian faith and life is not dull, boring, or depressing. The Christian faith and life is filled with the Holy Spirit and His great gifts of joy, peace, and thankfulness.

¹ This paragraph is a brief summary and overview of the Doctrine of Election (sometimes called “Predestination”). If you came to faith as an adult, then the Lord worked through His Word prior to your Baptism, and that working through His Word was your call to faith. In the normal course of things, godly parents bring their infant children to Baptism, and that is their Call to faith.

² From Luther’s Small Catechism: “How can the water of Holy Baptism do such great things? It is not the water that does these things, but the Word of God which is in and with the water, and faith which trusts this Word of God in the water. For without the Word of God the water is simply water, and no baptism; but with the Word of God it is a Baptism, that is, a gracious water of life and washing of regeneration in the Holy Spirit ...”

Do you have that excitement and joy in your life? Or have you lost it somehow? Has the excitement of the Christian faith and the great blessings of eternal salvation worn off? As Lutherans, we joke a lot about not being expressive in our faith; but that does not mean we have lost the joy and the excitement of eternal salvation. If you feel like you've lost some joy and excitement about your Christian faith and life then go back to the basics. Remember who you were before Jesus called you to faith. You were a lost condemned creature, facing the terror of death, and knowing that eternal condemnation awaited you. But God called you by name, by grace, in Christ before the creation of the world. He intervened in your life because He loves you so much, and He rescued you from your sin so that you will now survive death and escape the final condemnation. The significance of what God has done for you is what creates the joy and the excitement in your life. Everything is different in your life because of Christ. You live with purpose, you walk in faith, and you will die in hope. If you feel like you've lost the joy of salvation and the excitement of faith, then go back to the basics and remember God's great love for you in His Son Jesus Christ!

Phillip's joy and excitement took him right to his friend Nathaniel, so he could share the good news of Jesus with him. That's the nature of faith: **its contagious!** When Nathaniel heard about Jesus, he is skeptical; he doesn't think too much about Nazareth. But Philip is not interested in arguing about Nazareth; he simply invites Nathaniel to meet Jesus.

And that's how it works in the Christian faith. Believers in Jesus reach out to those who do not know Jesus. A simple invitation to Church so other people can hear and learn about Jesus for themselves. You can do that. You don't need a doctorate in theology to invite people to Church, or to introduce yourself to the people sitting around you in worship. A simple invitation and a friendly smile go a long way. Jesus will do the heavy lifting through His Word; His Holy Spirit will create the faith in a person's heart. God the Father's love is apparent. Phillip simply said, "Come and see!" It's the best kind of evangelism; it's personal, it's natural, and it lets Jesus do the work through His powerful Word. It's the nature of faith to share it with others: **its contagious!**

We live in a world that continually tells itself that there's nothing good in the Church. Christianity is maligned; Christians are portrayed as hypocrites; and Christ is hated and despised. The false teachers have watered down the message; and the apostasy give us all a black eye. To the world the Church is seen as “Nazareth” -- *can anything good come out of Nazareth?*

The answer, of course, is “yes” -- something very good is found in faithful Churches³! As conservative Lutheran Christians, we have something that the world desperately needs: the good news of eternal salvation in Jesus, the Son of God and the Savior of the world. He is not found in the grocery store, nor on the golf course: He is found in His Church where His Word is proclaimed. Invite your friends to Church! Bring them to the studies and events that we have here at Trinity! If they are parents, encourage them to take a tour of our school! This is a place where the gospel of Jesus Christ is proclaimed. This is a place where people will be introduced to the real Jesus. This is a place where people can hear and see for themselves the love of God in the Lord Jesus Christ! Invite your friends and your family to “come and see!”

Nathaniel accepted Philip's invitation, and he came to meet Jesus. In a remarkable exchange, Jesus tells Nathaniel something that only God knew about him, “*Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.*”⁴ With those words, Nathaniel was called to faith! He confessed his faith by saying, “*Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!*”

³ Unfortunately, we have to be extremely guarded when we talk about “Churches,” because not all churches teach the truth about Christ. For instance, many teach that Jesus is not God; others teach that you have to do good works to earn your own salvation; and still many others are totally “affirming” gay pride churches (just to name 3 examples). To invite people to those kind of churches would be irresponsible, unloving, and blasphemous!

⁴ Some believe that “under the fig tree” is a figure of speech. Here is an example of that interpretation: “Back in those days, it was ‘under the fig tree’ that people studied the Scriptures. In other words, it was ‘under the fig tree’ that Nathanael read what the ancient Scriptures had to say about the Messiah to come. In other words, Nathanael's study of the Word taught him what he needed to know about the Messiah. . . . With all that as background, it's not difficult to understand why it didn't take long for Nathanael to be convinced that Jesus was truly the Messiah. “John 1:45-46 Sermon”, Terry Defoe, January 8, 2015 I don't hold to this view, I think it takes the intensely personal, miraculous, and even mysterious element out of this intimate exchange between Nathaniel and his God who “saw him under the fig tree.” Jesus used this dramatic exchange to call Nathaniel to faith!

At this point, Nathaniel didn't fully understand what he was saying, but he would soon enough. Jesus responds that he *“will see greater things than these. Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”*

Jesus is referencing a story in the Old Testament where Jacob had a dream about a ladder between heaven and earth. Angels were ascending and descending between heaven and earth on this ladder. God was there, and He made promises to Jacob and blessed him through this dream.

Now that same God is on earth; in Jesus, Heaven and earth are united. Jesus is the Mediator between God and man; between Heaven and earth, like that ladder was in Jacob's dream. Jesus hung between Heaven and earth on the cross, reconciling God and man. There is now peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ. Nathaniel would certainly see great things: he would see the salvation event: the greatest event in earth history: the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ⁵! Nathaniel's call to faith is unique --- and it is dramatic --- and it all started with a simple invitation from Philip to “Come and see.”

Don't underestimate the power of your words, of your witness, and of a simple invitation to come to Church. It's here where people will hear the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. It's here where people will see the love and friendship that God's people have for each other. It's here where God is present to open hearts, create faith, and forgive sins. This is a place where people can see and hear from themselves the love of God in the Lord Jesus Christ!

God has Called us to faith in His Son Jesus. And that faith is contagious: it creates joy and excitement within us. We are all like Phillip, called to follow Jesus, and to reach out to our “Nathaniel's” -- our family and friends, with the good news of Jesus!

⁵ In the Old Testament story, Jacob named the place “Bethel” – which means “House of God.” “The church then is our ‘Bethel’, the house of God where we find Christ, where heaven is opened to us. Heaven and earth meet here in God's house, because Christ is present here. Indeed, in the Sacrament of the Altar, heaven and earth come together. Here we receive a foretaste of the feast to come.” Source unknown

Lord Jesus,
we thank you for calling Philip and Nathaniel
to faith by the power of Your Word.
Help us to understand that our calling is
from You, as is the gift of faith.
We ask that you would send us to our
friends and families,
so that with our words, our actions, and
even a simple invitation,
others will come to know Your love,
goodness, and mercy.
We pray that You work through the witness
of your people to bring others to faith.
Amen.

Genesis 28:10-19a

Jacob left Beersheba and went toward Haran. 11 And he came to a certain place and stayed there that night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place to sleep. 12 And he dreamed, and behold, there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven. And behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it! 13 And behold, the Lord stood above it and said, “I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. The land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring. 14 Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south, and in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed. 15 Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land. For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.” 16 Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, “Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it.” 17 And he was afraid and said, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.” 18 So early in the morning Jacob took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. 19 He called the name of that place Bethel ...

2 Corinthians 5:16-21

From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. 17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. 18 All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; 19 that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. 20 Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. 21 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

John 1:43-51

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Follow me.” 44 Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. 45 Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.” 46 Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.” 47 Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!” 48 Nathanael said to him, “How do you know me?” Jesus answered him, “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.” 49 Nathanael answered him, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” 50 Jesus answered him, “Because I said to you, ‘I saw you under the fig tree,’ do you believe? You will see greater things than these.” 51 And he said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”