

I remember the very moment it happened. One evening, when I was kneeling down on the grass of a freshly mowed softball field, putting on my spikes, getting ready to warm up for the game, Pastor Dan Swanson of First Baptist Church in Cokato, Minnesota, was responding to my question of greeting: “How are you tonight Pastor Dan?” He simply said, “I’ve got the best job in the world!” It was at that moment I felt something pierce my heart and my soul, and I heard the voice of God calling me to lay down my burdensome struggle of where I was going in life – and to follow Him into full time service. While still reluctant to do so, I talked with Pastor Dan what that would mean, and after Nancy and I wrestled through that together - we both affirmed God was calling us to follow Jesus not only as born again believers, but also to follow the call to serve him in the vocation of full time ministry.

In Matthew 16:24 we read that *“Jesus told his disciples, ‘If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.’”* Jesus said *“anyone”* – or everyone – who comes to faith in him, is called to follow him. We see that in our text for this morning as we read of Jesus calling the first four of his twelve disciples. We begin where we left off two weeks ago; John the Baptist had just baptized Jesus and then he cries out: *“I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God”* (John 1:34).

*The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples, and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God!” The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, “What are you seeking?” And they said to him, “Rabbi” (which means Teacher), “where are you staying?” He said to them, “Come and you will see.” So they came and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour. One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, “We have found the Messiah” (which means Christ). He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, “So you are Simon the son of John? You shall be called Cephas” (which means Peter).*

John 1:35-42

The gospels tell us that first two disciples here whom Jesus called to follow him were Andrew and the apostle John. While they were disciples of the John the Baptist, once Jesus walked by them and they heard Jesus was *“the Lamb of God!”* they left John and followed Jesus. This was John’s intent; his purpose in life was to *“Make straight the way of the Lord”* (John 1:23). When Jesus showed up, he pointed out Jesus so people would follow Jesus, instead of him. And because his calling and purpose in life was to *“Make straight the way of the Lord”* he declared Jesus was *“the Lamb of God!”* because he knew the first step towards following God is the step of dealing with our sin. The only real access we have to the Living God is through the doorway of the forgiveness of our sin. When we are ready to deal with our sin and to bring it to God, then we have an open door into the heart of God and the Kingdom of God. We never will find Jesus until we find him as the *“Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world”* (John 1:29). And so Andrew and the apostle John take that step and they follow Jesus because he is *“the Lamb of God.”*

As they began to follow Jesus, Jesus turns around and asks: *“What are you seeking?”* Notice that Jesus did not ask them, *“WHOM are you seeking?”* but *“WHAT are you seeking?”* In other words: “What do you want?” They answer with another question: *“Rabbi . . . where are you staying?”* By beginning their answer by calling Jesus *“Rabbi” (which means Teacher)* they reveal *“what”* they were *“seeking.”* They wanted to *learn* from *“the Lamb of God.”* They wanted to go where the *“Teacher”* was going and learn from *“the Lamb of God.”* They wanted to learn from the *“Teacher”* how to have their sins forgiven by *“the Lamb of God.”* They wanted to follow the shepherd who would take them to green pastures, and lead them beside still waters, and restore their souls, and lead them in paths of righteousness that lead through the valley of the shadow of death, and anoint their heads with the oil of goodness and mercy all the days of their lives, until they would dwell in the house of the Lord forever and ever. When Andrew and John ask Jesus *“Where are you staying?”* Jesus looked at them and said: *“Come and you will see.”*

*"So they came and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day."* God's Word tells us that at some point Andrew went out and found his brother Simon Peter and says: *"We have found the Messiah" (which means Christ).*" And *"He brought him to Jesus."* The term *"Messiah"* is a transliteration of the Hebrew word *"Christos"* that means "anointed." All the "anointed ones" of the Old Testament were priests, prophets and kings who had been set apart by God for a special calling and purpose of God. The Hebrew word *"Christos"* in the Old Testament ultimately became one of the names for the God- promised Savior of the world. The term *"Messiah"* is only found in the New Testament twice, both times it is in the Gospel of John. This is the name Andrew uses in telling his brother Peter about Jesus.

It is significant that Jesus started this all by asking Andrew the question: *"What are you seeking?"* And now we hear Andrew say to his brother, *"We have found the Messiah."* At first, Andrew was seeking to know where *"the lamb of God"* was staying. And now after he had spent time with him, he calls Jesus *"the Messiah."* When we seek to follow *"the lamb of God"* we will find *"the Messiah."* When we seek *Jesus*, we will find *Christ*. Our God seeks us out in wandering away from Him – and when we turn and look at Him, we will see the reality of our desperate need for a Savior and the provision of God's grace to meet our great need. All throughout the gospel of John we read that "coming to Jesus" means giving your heart to Jesus, and receiving the promise of God's forgiveness and life (5:40; 6:35, 37, 44, 7:37).

As Andrew brings his brother Simon Peter to Jesus, Jesus looks at him and says: *"So you are Simon the son of John? You shall be called Cephas" (which means Peter).* Changing Peter's name is not really that important in the name itself; *"Cephas"* is the Aramaic equivalent to the name *"Peter"* which is Greek. The both literally mean "a rock." It would be as if someone translated my German name "Leland" - which means "a valley meadow land" – into Aramaic. What is *highly significant* is that Jesus changed Peter's name. Giving a name to someone implies a great deal in the Bible. Adam named the animals that God had created, reflecting the reality that God had appointed Adam to rule over His creation. God renamed Abram to Abraham, and Sarai to Sarah, and Jacob to Israel to signify His sovereign hand in changing the lives and destiny of those people. This is what Jesus was doing to Peter when he changed his name. He was not only changing his name, he was calling him to a new life and giving him a new destiny.

Note that Jesus does not call Peter to follow him here; nor does Peter make a choice or decide to follow Jesus. Instead, Jesus renames Peter because Jesus has the sovereign authority of God to change our identity. Jesus has authority to give you and I whatever name he pleases to give us because he has the sovereign authority of God to determine our destiny. In Revelation 2:17 Jesus said: *"To the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it."* Before Peter ever gave his heart and life to Jesus, before Peter ever made a commitment to follow Jesus, Jesus gave him a new name. Someday in the glory of heaven Jesus will give a stone and we will look at that name on that stone, and we will know that name – and we will know what that name meant for us while we lived in this world. When we seek Jesus, we will find Christ; when we don't seek Jesus he will find us - and give us a new name.

*The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. 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." Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!" 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." Nathanael answered him, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" 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." 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." John 1:43-51*

Jesus goes to Galilee and *“he found Philip and said to him, ‘Follow me.’”* Note that John specifically says, Jesus *“found Philip”* not *“Philip found Jesus.”* Jesus found Philip and invited Philip to follow him. Philip is the only disciple in all the gospels that Jesus invites to follow him. Philip’s name is only mentioned once in each of the other three Gospels, and that’s just in the list of men Jesus appoints to be his disciples. Nothing else is said of him as an individual. Clearly Philip is not someone who would have distinguished himself in any special way like the other disciples of Jesus. He had no special gifting or personality or place in life that would have caused him to stand out. The very fact that Jesus found Philip and invited Philip to follow him tells us that Philip probably was so quiet and shy that he lacked the confidence to step forward and follow Jesus without an invitation. And so Jesus invites Philip to follow him.

This is a biblical principle that has always been dear to my heart. In 1 Corinthians 1:26-31 Paul writes: *“For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, ‘Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.’”*

Philip became, at our Lord’s invitation, one of the privileged few to follow Jesus as one of the twelve. Jesus has authority to call anyone he wants to follow him, regards of who they are or who they are not, because he has the sovereign authority of God to determine our destiny. In John 15:16 says: *“You did not choose me, but I chose you.”* Now this does not mean that we do not have to choose to follow Jesus. We must choose to give our hearts to Jesus and we must choose to follow Jesus. But what Jesus is saying is: *“When you choose me - when you really come to me and receive me as ‘the Lamb of God, the Messiah’ the Lord and Savior of your life - then you will know that I chose you first.”* Though unworthy, Jesus has chosen us! Jesus said: *“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him”* (John 6:44) and *“All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out”* (John 6:37).

We read that as Philip began to follow Jesus, he went and found Nathanael. John is the only one who uses this name; in the other gospels he is called *“Bartholomew.”* Nathanael is a much different person than Philip; through the dialogue we hear that he is not shy at all, but instead pretty strong willed. In our text we read Philip approaches him and says: *“We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.”* We see Nathanael’s character here in his response: *“Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”* Nathanael is bothered that Philip believes that *“the Messiah”* would come from *“Nazareth.”* In Jesus’ day, just as in our day, there was a great deal of prejudice about people and places. And just as I have shared with you that my family and I have experienced prejudice here against people from the United States – there probably were people in Port Alberni who, when they heard that you had called me to be your pastor, said: *“Can anything good come out of United States?”*

Galilee, where the city of Nazareth was located, was the geographical area where the people were considered to be racially and culturally inferior to the rest of Israel. When Jesus was called a *“Nazarene”* (someone from Nazareth) it was not compliment. For Nathanael, coming from Nazareth would disqualify Jesus from being considered to be *“the Messiah.”* John includes these words in his gospel to show us that Nathanael was more than skeptical about Jesus: *“Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”* Philip’s response to this question is: *“Come and see.”* And Nathanael does so, and as he approaches Jesus, our Lord says: *“Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!”* Nathanael stops in his tracks; he has yet to meet Jesus yet Jesus accurately describes his character. Stunned, Nathanael asks: *“How do you know me?”* And we read that *“Jesus answered him, ‘Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.’”* Nathanael is stunned again, this time to his very soul, and he cries out: *“Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!”* From what little he knows of Jesus, Nathanael is not predisposed to accept him as the *“Messiah”* - but once Jesus spoke into to his soul he believed he was *“the Messiah.”*

Jesus affirms this by saying: *"Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' do you believe? You 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' last words here are in reference to the dream that Jacob had centuries earlier when he left home, fleeing the wrath of his brother Esau because he had deceitfully gained the favored blessing of their father Isaac. At the site of the city of Bethel Jacob had a dream. Lonely and frightened, Jacob put his head on a stone for a pillow, fell asleep, and dreamed that he saw a ladder reaching up to heaven, and on it saw the angels of God ascending and descending. Jesus is saying to Nathanael, "You will understand this dream when you follow me. When you follow me you will learn that I am the way of life, the way of forgiveness of sin, the way of the hope of tomorrow, the way for fallen sinful human beings to be restored back to the relationship with the Holy God who created them. I am the *"lamb of God, the Messiah, the Son of God, the King of Israel."* I am the one who has the sovereign authority to call you and rename you and change your destiny. I am the ladder to God."

Nathanael asked Jesus: *"How do you know me?"* In Galatians 4:8-9 the apostle Paul writes: *"Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods. But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more?"* Paul is telling us we *"know"* God because we are *"known"* by God. This is just like Jesus saying: *"You did not choose me, but I chose you."* We *"know"* God because He has already *"known"* us. Jesus *"knows"* us because he has *"known"* us. *Jesus knows our circumstances.* Just as he saw Nathanael sitting under a tree, Jesus sees us under the trees of every circumstance in life; no matter where we are, Jesus is always fully aware of every minute detail that is going on. *Jesus knows our hearts.* Just as he saw deep into Nathanael's character, so does Jesus know every thought, motivation and attitude of our character. Just as Jesus knew the condition of Nathanael's soul, so does Jesus know the condition of our soul. Jesus knows us inside and out.

*O LORD, you have searched me and known me!*

*You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar.*

*You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways.*

*Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know it altogether.*

*You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me.*

*Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it.*

*Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence?*

*If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!*

*If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,  
even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me.*

*If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night,"*

*even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you.*

*For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb.*

*I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well.*

*My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret,  
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.*

*Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them,  
the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.*

*How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them!*

*If I would count them, they are more than the sand. I awake, and I am still with you. Psalms 139:1-18*

We seek Jesus because Jesus has been seeking us. When we seek Jesus, we will find Christ; when we don't seek Jesus he will find us and he will give us a new name. We follow Jesus because Jesus has found us. Jesus has authority to call anyone he wants to follow him, regards of who they are or who they are not, because he has the sovereign authority of God to determine our destiny. Jesus is our ladder to God!

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