

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today is “Gideon Sunday” and I am accommodating our temple talk speaker with a much shorter sermon than usual, so I’m advising you to “listen fast!” You likely noticed that our Gospel text today has a kind of natural progression or flow to it. Let me quickly review it for you, and you can see how well you were listening as that text was first read:

First, we were told Jesus went to Galilee. Next, we were told that it was in Galilee that Jesus found Philip. There Jesus said to Philip, “Follow me.” And Philip did indeed follow Jesus – but the story doesn’t end there; in fact, it’s just beginning.

Philip then found Nathanael, and Philip told Nathanael about Jesus, and here we now find some specificity and detail as to exactly what Philip told Nathaniel. He told him that Jesus was the one of whom Moses and the prophets wrote. And he also told him that Jesus was from Nazareth.

We’re not told why Philip thought Nathanael should know that Jesus was the one of whom Moses and the prophets had written, but clearly Philip thought this would be of relevance and importance to Nathanael or he would not have shared it.

Still, that information doesn’t appear to have initially engaged or interested Nathanael, for his response to Philip has to do with Philip having said the other thing: that Jesus was from Nazareth. And specifically, Nathanael asked, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”

That response sounds a great deal like a “put down,” like a denigrating and derisive remark, but Philip’s response is neither defensive, not equally negative. Philip takes it all in and then simply says, “Come and see.”

And Nathanael did – he came and saw, and he heard and believed, even praising and honoring Jesus as both the King of Israel and the Son of God.

And these comments seem to imply that Philip’s telling Nathanael that Jesus was the one of whom Moses and the prophets wrote did in fact take root in Nathanael and make a difference in his attitude and response to Jesus.

Gospel-writer John doesn’t give us any detail about Nathanael’s question about the worth or value of Nazareth. Did Nazareth have a prior bad reputation, or was Nathanael a born skeptic? We simply don’t know, but we do know that Philip wasn’t deterred by Nathanael’s question, or negativism, if that’s what it was.

And we do know that Philip didn’t clam up, and he didn’t give up, and he didn’t walk away in silence. Neither did he employ a multiple-step, complicated evangelism strategy, nor did he spout forth with a deeply-reasoned theological explanation as to why Nathanael should meet Jesus.

Sometimes the simple and straight-forward approach is best. Philip just said, “Come and see.” He understood the call to share the Good News of Jesus Christ. He wasn’t a walking repository of Bible knowledge; he wasn’t a trained theologian; he wasn’t an accomplished debater and defender of the faith. But he was welcoming, inviting, and hospitable.

Nothing more is expected of us – and nothing less. Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus forever. Amen.

Alan Goertemiller, Pastor
Pilgrim Lutheran Church of Indianapolis, Inc.