

43 The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, "Follow me."

44 Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. 45 Philip 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.

47 When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, "Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit."

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."

49 Then Nathanael declared, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel."

50 Jesus said, "You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You will see greater things than that." 51 He then added, "Very truly I tell you, you will see 'heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on' the Son of Man."

Dear Friends in Christ,

In 2013 a movie was produced for the WELS called "*Come Follow Me.*" The movie, although it was small budget film for a small audience, gathered attention for its quality and its message. If you have not seen it, I would recommend that you watch it.

Simply put the movie shows us Jesus, the Savior. It also shows why we should follow him. When you saw the sermon theme for today, you may have wondered, "*Is Pastor showing that video again?*" I am not showing it today, but that movie has a connection with John, chapter 1. The gospel reading for today, I believe, provided the title for that movie.

I believe that most, if not all the people sitting in front of me are followers of Jesus. So why would we spend time looking at this word of God? The answer is that we need our faith in Jesus built up. This word reveals Jesus. It builds our faith. This word of God also helps us to remember that we serve Jesus by inviting others to follow him.

The word "Epiphany" means "to reveal." Today Jesus is revealed to us as the divine Savior who calls out, "**Come Follow Me!**"

1. An invitation is extended.

We just celebrated Christmas. As we move on in the church year, Jesus born at Bethlehem is no longer an infant. He is now 30 years old. He has been baptized in the Jordan River. He now begins his public ministry. He is preaching and teaching, but he is doing more than that. He is calling people to be his disciples. We hear Jesus extending an invitation.

A. Pastor Gary Baumler in his book *The People's Bible: John* speculates that Peter and Andrew knew Philip and had told him about Jesus. We don't know that; however, we do know that as people encountered Jesus, they did tell others. Philip heard about Jesus. Now Jesus seeks out Philip and extends a simple invitation, **"Follow me."** What did Jesus mean?

1. Part of what Jesus meant is that Philip was to hold to his belief that Jesus was the long, promised Messiah. Jesus had come into the world to be the Savior. There would be things that would happen that would challenge Philip's faith. One example would be Jesus' rejection by the Jewish leaders and most of the people. Jesus wanted Philip to continue to believe in him.

2. "Follow me." also meant "listen to me." Philip would hear God's word from Jesus. He would grow in his knowledge and faith. When we say we are Christians and followers of Jesus, it means that we regularly hear and take to heart God's word. Philip and the disciples did, and this is what we do.

B. We know that Jesus and his word had already had an impact on Philip's heart. He runs out and finds his friend Nathanael and invites him to come and follow Jesus. The exchange between these two men is important.

1. **Philip 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." (45)** Notice he doesn't say that Jesus is a great teacher or preacher. Nathanael is a true believer who is acquainted with Scripture. Philip identifies Jesus as the one is written about in the Law of Moses and the prophets. He was telling Nathanael, "Jesus is the long, awaited Savior who was promised by God."

It is important that when we invite people to come to Jesus that we do something similar. We may use specific words of Scripture, "Our church teaches salvation by grace in Jesus." Or you may simply say, "We follow the Bible that says Jesus is our one and only Savior." By doing this we are showing people that the message is coming from God and not from us.

2. Philip did this, but he still ran into an objection. **"Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?"** People, even good people like

Nathanael, are going to come with objections or questions. Philip's response is one that we can use. **"Come and see."** Philip trusted that Jesus would provide the answer to Nathanael's question. We trust that the Lord will provide answers today when we bring people to Jesus. Remember Jesus promised, **"Ask and it will be given to you."** (Matthew 7:7)

C. Today Jesus is looking at you and extending his invitation, **"Follow me."** As I said, most if not all of us are followers of Jesus. Has our enthusiasm fallen off? Are we busy? Are there things that we wish Jesus didn't see us doing? Are we asking people to come and see Jesus, but not many seem to listen? We see other Christians lose their enthusiasm and fall away.

I believe that this word of God is meant to fill us with fresh enthusiasm. The Jews had been waiting thousands of years to see the Messiah. He did come. We are waiting, but Jesus will come again. When we see him, we will be filled with joy.

We also see Jesus in God's word in the Bible. That is how Jesus come to us today and he also comes in Baptism and the Lord's Supper. We see him with eyes of faith. We believe he is here. He is building our faith as we listen to him. If you are doubting or down, go to his Word. He will lift you up.

The joy that Jesus gives naturally makes enthusiastic to share him with others. Jesus will give us tools to invite others. We have copies of the movie left. (*Come Follow Me*) Some are on the book case where we conduct Bible class. Take one now or in the future to share with someone who you want to invite to church. We also have other invitations, like Time of Grace business cards, plus tracts and brochures. Jesus is inviting others, **"Follow me."**

2. A Savior revealed.

Philip was enthusiastic, but would Jesus measure up to expectations?

A. Jesus does not disappoint. He is revealed as the divine Savior.

1. Jesus tells us important facts about a man he had never met. **"Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit."** (47) Nathanael is stunned and asks, **"How do you know me?"** (48) Today con artists sometimes can pick up little clues about a person and use them to make it sound like they know intimate facts about a stranger. The fictitious Sherlock Holmes was famous for doing that. With Jesus it doesn't involve guess work. He sees people to their core and he also knows everything that they do. Jesus demonstrates this with his next words.

2. **Jesus answered, “I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you.”** Jewish people often rested in the shade of a fig tree and they would pray and meditate there. Jesus not only knew that Nathanael was there, but what he was thinking. Only God could do such a thing. Nathanael confesses, **“Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel.”** (49) Later St. Paul would confess in his letter to the Colossians, **“in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form.”** (2:9)

The disciples were impressed, but Jesus announces they will see greater miracles than the one he just performed.

B. One of Jesus’ greatest miracles was to open heaven for us. Jesus came to work the miracle of salvation.

1. Jesus announces this when he says, **“Very truly I tell you, you will see ‘heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on’ [Gen. 28:12] the Son of Man.”** (51) Nathanael and all those waiting for the Messiah knew this story of Jacob. Jacob in a dream saw a stairway reaching from heaven to earth with angels going back and forth. Jacob had access to God in his prayers and later to heaven when he died. Jesus is clearly teaching that through him all the disciples would have access to God in their prayers and in traveling to heaven someday.

2. I am sure that the disciples looked at Jesus in wonder. How was he going to provide access to heaven for sinners like them? In due time the details of this “miracle” would be revealed to them. Jesus would be lifted up off the ground so that all who looked to him would not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16) They would see God’s Son who was a true man lifted up on a Roman cross. Jesus would die to make them holy. He would provide access to heaven.

C. When we invite people to “come and see” Jesus, this is what we are inviting them to. He is not some miracle worker who only makes our lives here better. Jesus is not a good luck charm that we cling to in times of trouble.

When we bring people to Jesus, we are introducing them to God who opens heaven for them. Jesus death on the cross was to pay for the sins of the world. He opened heaven for all. All who believe in him can take their prayers to God in heaven, but they can also expect to live with God in heaven. We bring people to Jesus because he is our sure hope in a hopeless world.

Conclusion: I want to invite you to watch the 2013 movie, “*Come Follow Me*” again.

Celebrate that God has revealed himself to you. You know Jesus. He is God. He is the one who took your sins away. He is the one who calls you to not only follow in faith, but serve him. One way we serve him is to invite others to get to know him.

Many people claim to be religious. Some even claim Jesus is important. Most do not see Jesus the way you and I do. Invite others to follow Jesus, the Son of God and the Savior. Jesus is constantly building our faith, so we can. Amen.