

The Second Sunday after Epiphany

January 18, 2009

The Call out of Darkness to Light

John 1:43-51

In the name of the Father and of the † Son and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

Philip was called out of the darkness of sin into light. The Eternal Light had broken into the darkness and Philip was going to share that great news with Nathaniel. He had been filled with Good News and Philip shared it with Nathaniel, **We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.** Nathaniel, the ONE who fulfilled Moses and the prophets is HERE! The Savior HAS COME! We could imagine Philip's enthusiasm. Yet what is it met with, skepticism. **Can anything good come out of Nazareth?** What a drag. It is hard to evangelize. Philip doesn't give up. He keeps talking and tells Nathaniel **come and see.**

It's hard work, evangelism. Perhaps you felt like Philip bursting at the seams, that you know Jesus is your Savior and that you trust in Him alone! He has come to you and has given you the gift of faith and told you to **Follow Me.** You were excited about your church, about your faith, and your Lord, you went and spoke to a neighbor or family member about Jesus. That your sins have been forgiven, about the gracious promise of eternal life. How was it received? With darkness, with anger, doubt, questions, skepticism.

But before we convict that behavior in others we need to look at how we receive God's message of Good News. How often do we hear God's Word with the same eagerness and joy as others that we see? How often do we hear God's Word and fail to trust in it? Don't we get our priorities mixed

up? We get concerned about what everyone else is doing and not on what I'm doing. Isn't that reluctant, whatever feeling alive and well in us as it was in Nathaniel? Don't we have an evangelism chairman and two pastors, isn't that why we have them, so we don't have to bother? I know even wearing my collar in the community I become paranoid at sharing the faith at times, not knowing what kind of reaction I will receive. Evangelism is tough, not only when we reach out to others but to us.

So the Holy Spirit had a tough row to plow. He is the only true evangelist. As hard as we may try, no matter how eloquent we are, how much we study, we can't convince anyone to believe. Not even ourselves. Philip couldn't do it, I can't, Pastor Buss can't, and you can't. Only the Holy Spirit can convert someone. From darkness into light. As we learn from the *Catechism: I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.*

This is the work of the Holy Spirit. To Reveal Christ! That is what Epiphany and its season is about, revealing Christ to the world. That not only is Christ the Son of God, beloved, but that He came into this world to die for us sinners. To take our place upon the cross. That is the work of Christ. It is a mission begun before creation, accomplished at His incarnation and death, His resurrection, and continued to this day. That is HIS mission. Sometimes its easy for us to think, ok, Christ did His part, now its my turn. But its not up to us. It has always been His mission and His alone. He uses us as His instruments, as members of His body to carry out the mission, but that doesn't make it ours.

Not only did we hear of the mission in the Gospel but in the Old Testament and the Epistle. God used His means, Eli, to lead Samuel to

know the Lord. What about the Corinthians? Given to sexual immorality God, using Paul, doesn't abandon His people. The people of Corinth sure don't seem to care much about God. Yet Paul continues to write to them, encouraging them, convicting them of their sins, and showing them the Gospel. God doesn't give up on the people, even in the worst situations. It's God mission, His Work, not Paul's mission or work. It is God's means, His work!

And today, how does God work among us in this world? Perhaps it is ways we can see and identify, but also in ways that we can't understand. He has given us definite means, His Word and His Sacraments! And we are to rely upon them. It is His mission. His means, His time. And it may take longer than we ever thought, OR it may take a very short time. Hear Nathaniel again, **How do you know me? His answer Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.** God sees. God knows. Even when you believe that you are alone.

You are not alone! Though we have cells, iPhones, TV's, GPS, satellite radio, and we communicate more and more, many feel and are lonelier than before. Many feel trapped, that I am alone, even when surrounded by people, alone in my guilt, alone in my sin. But you are not alone! For God is with You. Again even when Nathaniel was under the fig tree the Lord knew him. He was present with Him. It is God's means. God's time. It is God who calls, gathers, enlightens, sanctifies, and the keeps us.

We see greater things through the eyes of faith. **Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.** That is Jacob's ladder. It is not a ladder that we climb, it is Jesus coming to us, connecting His Church on Earth with the Heavenly Church body. We know Him as He descends to us in His Word: You are not alone in your

sin; I forgive you all your sins. He descends upon us in the Waters of life and says: I have adopted you and made you mine. My death, My resurrection is yours. He descends to us in His true Body and Blood as we hear His invitation: Take and eat. This is My body given for you. Take and drink, this is my blood shed for you. You are not alone; I am with You in My body and blood. God continues to work in us. He continues to give us the Gospel. In His means! As Nathaniel heard His Word and believed, we also confess.

We confess. That is Christ's mission. That we confess His Word and His name! We confess that we have the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. As we speak the Word the Holy Spirit uses us. We confess. We are not silent. We use the Word, for that is what God has given to us. Satan fears the Word, and when we are silent, He has nothing to fear. We confess. We confess the same Word that brings us comfort and hope in times of sickness, sin, doubts, fears, worries, and why would we not want others to confess that same Word?

We confess. That is Christ's mission – that we confess His name. Through that confession He will carry out His work in this World.

In † Jesus Name. Amen.